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Panasonic 55in Ultra HD TV
Sony Dolby Atmos soundbar
Amazon Spot AI speaker
Optoma HD27e Full HD projector

PICTURE PERFECTION

Exclusive review: Philips' 55in OLED TV delivers another 4K HDR knockout

The best of UHD Blu-ray

20 discs that'll blow you away

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A QUIET PLACE 4K
PETER RABBIT 4K
GHOST STORIES
DOCTOR WHO

INSIDE BUYER'S GUIDE → READER'S ROOM → ELIPSON INFINITE SPEAKERS
→ COLLECTING... POST-APOCALYPTIC MOVIES → OPINION → POLK 5.1 SOUNDBAR



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LG OLED TV and Dolby Atmos Sound bar – The perfect cinema experience at home.

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LG OLED TV AI ThinQ®

Discover more: lg.com/uk/lgoled
Model Shown: C8, SK10Y

HOME CINEMA Choice

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NEXT ISSUE ON SALE: September 6, 2018

Vintage 3D movies, p30



Welcome

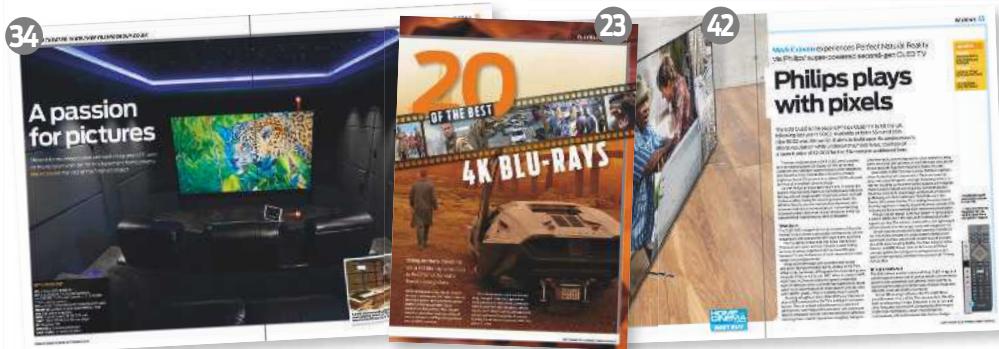
Sitting indoors watching movies in the height of Summer never quite feels right, and the scorching that 2018 has thrown at us has had an ever bigger impact on my viewing habits than usual. **The sound of my portable fan whirring away in the background is a sure-fire mood-killer** when watching a flick like

A Quiet Place. In fact, I'm almost relieved that the darker, cooler nights of Autumn are gradually creeping up on us. Excessive heat can be managed to a certain extent, but stray sunbeams and daylight until past 9pm also pose a problem to those who like to enjoy their home cinema in the dark.

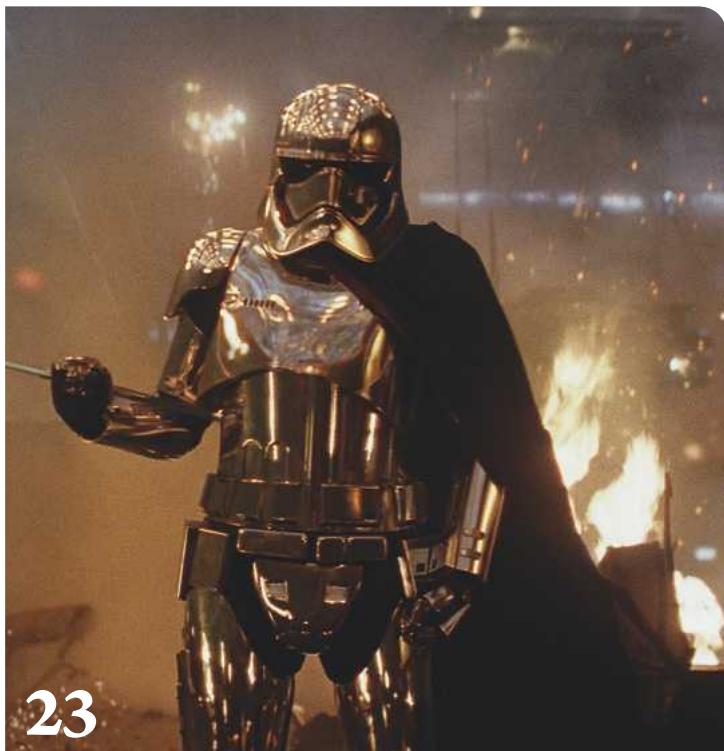
These days, with TVs getting ever brighter, there's perhaps less of a need to seek black-out conditions for movie viewing. One reason why cinemas are dark is, historically, the projectors were rubbish. But darkness has other benefits too. Not only does it focus your attention on the bigscreen, no one else can see that you've taken off your trousers because you're too hot...



Mark Craven
Editor



MENU



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John Archer:
The experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



Jon Thompson:
Film producer and post-production expert delves into Hollywood and AV



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HCC's former Ed. is one of the UK's most respected AV journos



Martin Pipe:
Technical expert Martin is renown throughout the industry



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Former Editor of the UK CE trade journal *ERT*



Ed Selley:
Audiophile Ed mixes his home cinema passion with a love of vinyl



Vincent Teoh:
Professional video calibrator writes about technology and tweaking

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10 post-apocalyptic movies that deserve a place in your disc collection

SVS

BASS INVADERS



“ It can deliver big bass moments with a visceral sense of scale but it never feels forced, retaining an organic cohesiveness that's a joy. ”

AV Forums,
May 2018



“ ...if space is an issue then the PC-4000 might be the ideal solution. And considering the state-of-the-art subwoofery inside, it isn't that expensive either. ”

Home Cinema
Choice, Aug 2018



“ ...SB-4000 delivers almost the textbook definition of great home cinema bass; deep, clean and fast, and easily integrated... ”

Home Cinema
Choice, April 2018



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audio - visual

BULLETIN

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KLIPSCH Reference floorstanders get UK launch **BOX OFFICE** Summer 2018 breaks records
AT THE 'PLEX This month's cinema releases **NEWS X10** Hot news stories in bite-sized chunks
2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY Nolan brings Kubrick's vision home on 4K BD **& MORE!**

Are you talkin' to me?

Acer V6820i → www.acer.com



Too lazy to lift a remote? Acer's V6820i adds voice control via Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant devices to an entry-level 4K HDR projector spec sheet that also includes Full HD 3D playback. A compact and relatively affordable (£1,500) model employing Texas Instruments' latest DLP technology, it offers Colour Purity and AcuMotion processing, plus a 2,400 Lumens claimed brightness – and if you're prepared to sacrifice some of that lamp power, Acer claims it can extend its life-time to 15,000 hours.

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Budget Bluetooters

Denon AVR-X250BT & AVR-X550BT → www.denon.com

Denon's 2018 AVR range kicks off with a pair of Bluetooth-enabled (but not networked) five-channel models aimed at home cinema beginners. The AVR-X250BT (pictured, £230) and AVR-X550BT (£300) both feature 4K HDR passthrough over HDMI, Dolby TrueHD

and DTS-HD Master Audio decoding, and a power claim of 130W per channel. The pricier receiver adds Dolby Vision passthrough, music playback via USB, auto speaker calibration and a second subwoofer output. Available now through Richer Sounds.

Totally Klipsch floorstanders



Klipsch's RF-7 III reference floorstander is coming to the UK via the brand's distributor Henley Audio. Priced at £3,750 per pair, the speaker uses a horn-loaded 1.75in titanium compression driver and a pair of 10in midbass drivers, and weighs in at 44kg. 'They are the best-sounding audiophile speaker at this price point,' boasts Klipsch product manager Kerry Geist. For home cinema setups, the RF-7 IIs can be matched with the RC-64 III Centre Channel. www.henleyaudio.co.uk

Tivoli goes round and about



Audio marque Tivoli has launched the Andiamo, the first entry in its new Tivoli Go range of portable Bluetooth speakers. Featuring a leather carry strap and rechargeable 20-hour Lithium-ion battery, this circular squawker features a 2.5in full-range driver, 3in passive radiator and 'ultra-efficient' 20W amplifier partnered with a 24-bit DSP engine. Bluetooth 3.0 connectivity is joined by a physical 3.5mm input. It's available now, in black or silver cabinet designs, for £190 approx. www.sounddesigndistribution.co.uk

New deal for Onk and Pio

AV brands' European business acquired for €140m by new distributor

The European division of Onkyo & Pioneer Corporation, the hi-fi and home cinema-focused joint-brand company, has been sold to Austrian-based distribution specialist Aqipa.

The deal will see Aqipa acquire 'all assets' of Pioneer/Onkyo's European business, plus those of Integra, Teac and Esoteric, and is valued at around €140m.

The official announcement from Pioneer & Onkyo Europe describes Aqipa as a 'value-added distributor within the consumer electronics channel'.

'Based on this agreement, all business activities relating to sales, marketing, after-sales service, customer care, finance, spare parts and distribution for the brands Pioneer, Onkyo, Integra, Teac and Esoteric in Europe will be transferred to Aqipa with effect from October 1, 2018,' says the company.

Susumu Shiotsuka, President of Pioneer & Onkyo Europe, is upbeat about the deal: 'This agreement... will make it possible to optimise the distribution of our products, expand sales channels and significantly strengthen the brand presence in Europe.'

'In future, we will be able to focus on our core competencies in the areas of development,

production and brand-building. Together with Aqipa, we are confident that we can deliver a new level of performance in Europe, one that will please all our customers.'

The acquisition is the latest in a series of corporate manoeuvres that saw Pioneer Home Entertainment (but not Pioneer's DJ or in-car audio divisions) become a subsidiary of Onkyo in 2015. Previously, music specialist Gibson Brands had acquired a minority stake in Onkyo, but that was disposed of before Gibson filed for bankruptcy in March this year.

For 2018, Pioneer's home cinema flagship is the SC-LX901, an 11.2-channel Dolby Atmos/DTS:X receiver; it has also launched the high-end PD-70AE SACD player (pictured) and teased a 4K Blu-ray spinner. Onkyo also sells an 11-channel AVR model (the TZ-RZ3100), plus an 11-channel processor (PR-RZ5100) and nine-channel power amplifier (PA-MC5501). Both brands also have AVR lineups that range down to affordable 5.1 designs.

A UK spokesperson for Pioneer & Onkyo Europe told *HCC* that the deal will have no negative effect on the brands' presence at retailers, nor its product development ambitions.



Pioneer: still rocking SACD in 2018...

Playlist...

Team *HCC* spins up its disc picks of the month

Tomb Raider (Ultra HD Blu-ray)

This videogame reboot may stumble into a few storytelling traps, but it's still worth hunting down the Dolby Vision 4K disc for the magnificent AV treasures it unearths.



Game Night (All-region BD)



This surprisingly smart and sharp comedy isn't playing around when it comes to delivering top-tier Full HD visuals on Blu-ray.

Detective Bureau 2-3: Go to Hell Bastards! (Region B BD)



Arrow adds another must-see title to its Seijin Suzuki BD lineup with this gonzo 1963 crime comedy.

The Piano (Region B BD)



Haunting drama returns to BD with a brand-new *The Piano* at 25 featurette and the CD soundtrack.

Black Butterfly (Region B BD)



Antonio Banderas stars in this nerve-wracking reminder about not taking shifty drifters home.

At the 'plex...

Heading out to see a flick?
Catch these this month

The Meg

August 10: Jason Statham takes on a 95-foot prehistoric shark in this adaptation of Steve Alton's 1997 page-turner. Judging from the clips released to date, we expect *The Meg* to take a big bite out of its bigscreen competition.

The Equalizer 2

August 17: Denzel Washington reunites with director Antoine Fuqua for this sequel to the 2014 cinematic update of the TV series. This time around Washington's retired CIA agent Robert McCall is hot on the trail of the people who murdered his closest friend.

BlacKKKlansman

August 24: Set in the 1970s and inspired by real events, Spike Lee's award-winning comic-drama tells the story of an African-American detective in Colorado who infiltrated the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan.

Cinema's Summer of love

Box office receipts break records, buoyed by another Marvel mega-hit

The success of *Avengers: Infinity War* helped cinemas take record receipts in the second quarter of 2018 in the US. Box office tills rang through \$3.4bn of sales, nearly 20 per cent higher than during the same period last year.

The third *Avengers* flick debuted in April with a monster \$257m opening weekend, and has since earned over \$670m in the US (plus a further \$1.3bn abroad). Also helping to account for the April-June ticket surge was Disney's *The Incredibles 2*, which launched in June and has also cleared the \$500m domestic barrier; *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* (which has taken over \$380m); *Deadpool 2* (\$317m); *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (\$210m); and *A Quiet Place* (\$187m).

This record-breaking second quarter followed a strong opening three months, where Marvel's *Black Panther* earned over \$600m from a February release date, and Steven Spielberg sci-fi *Ready Player One* mopped up more than \$130m in March.

Combined, the first six months of 2018 put the year on course to be Hollywood's most successful yet, although the lack of a Christmas *Star Wars* movie may count against it. The previous 12-month high of \$11.37bn was earned in 2016, with *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* putting bums on seats in December. This year cinema-goers can choose from DC flick *Aquaman*, Transformers spin-off *Bumblebee* or the *Mary Poppins* remake for their festive outing.

And it's not been all good news for Hollywood studios. Action movie *Skyscraper*, released in July, has failed to live up to expectations. Despite starring go-to man Dwayne Johnson, it recorded

a low opening weekend figure of around \$23m, behind animated 'toon sequel *Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation*.

The UK's 2018 box office performance has mainly mirrored that of across the pond. The two largest weekends of the year correspond to the releases of *Avengers: Infinity War* (£35.5m) and *Black Panther* (£30.8m). Yet warm weather and England's performance at the 2018 FIFA World Cup appears to have taken its toll; the weekend of July 6, when England played its quarter-final against Sweden, saw UK cinemas take a mere £6m, the lowest three-day figure of the year so far.



Black Panther took over \$600m in the US

B&W polishes its Diamonds

Brit brand announces new Prestige Editions of 802 and 805 speakers

Citing 'strong demand' from both its customers and its dealers, Bowers & Wilkins has unveiled a new look for its 805 standmount and 802 floorstanding speakers.

Both 800 Series Diamond models are now available from 'specialist' retailers as Prestige Editions in a Santos Rosewood finish.

According to B&W, this premium design requires 40 per cent more manufacturing time than a standard model, takes around four weeks to complete, and involves hand-finishing a 13-layer lacquer coating. The brand believes it enhances an 'already iconic product.'

Both speakers, however, remain untouched in terms of sonic performance. The Prestige Editions feature the same Diamond Dome tweeters, Continuum cone mid-range units and Aerofoil cone woofers as their more down-to-earth (but still pricey) siblings. Cabinet construction is also identical.

Pricing is £5,500 per pair for the 805, and £19,500 for the 802.
www.bowerswilkins.com

Bowers & Wilkins has launched Prestige Editions of its 802 Diamond floorstander and 805 Diamond standmount – but not yet on the range-topping 800 model



Now with more depth
and more clarity



WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2017

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Best standmount speaker £400-£800
KEF Q350

AVTech media
AWARDS 2017/18

BEST FLOORSTANDING
SPEAKER SYSTEM
KEF Q SERIES 5.1.2

The new Q Series hi-fi speakers

The eighth iteration of this successful range continues to be centred on KEF's legendary Uni-Q driver array, and is now enhanced with a new system design, beefier low-frequency drivers and a new damped tweeter loading tube. The result is superior bass performance and an even more detailed natural sound. Listen for yourself and experience pleasure in high resolution.

KEF

KEF.COM

OBSSESSED WITH HIGH RESOLUTION

Extras...

Small items that could make a big impression...

LEGO Voltron: Defender of the Universe

The latest addition to the fan-suggested LEGO Ideas range is here! Based on the hit anime '80s

series *Voltron: Defender of the Universe*, it features five brick-built robot lions who combine to form the titular giant mecha. Priced around £160, the 2,321-piece set hit the shelves at the start of August and is sure to go down a storm with giant robot fans.

Watching Skies: Star Wars, Spielberg and Us

We expect there will be a lot of *HCC* readers who can relate to author Mark O'Connell's wonderful new book

about growing up with the likes of *Star Wars*, *E.T.* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Part moving memoir, part nostalgic head-rush through a landscape of much-cherished movie merchandise, *Watching Skies...* offers a particularly British account of what it was like to be a child during this transformative time in Hollywood cinema.

Thirteenth Doctor's Sonic Screwdriver

There will be a brand-new Doctor in the TARDIS when *Doctor Who* returns to BBC One this Autumn. To mark the occasion, toymaker Character Designs has released an eight-inch light-up replica of her redesigned Sonic Screwdriver, which can be yours for £17.

Let's get physical (media)

Disc formats are still in rude health, despite booming digital ownership

Once again, it seems that predictions of the demise of physical disc sales have been exaggerated. According to the latest figures released by industry body BASE (the British Association for Screen Entertainment), there is no slow down in the market, despite the proliferation of streaming services like Netflix and Amazon Prime. What's more, sales of physical media continue to seriously out-muscle digital downloads – and DVD still rules the roost.

A breakdown of the BASE figures shows that during the first six months of 2018, a massive 64.7 per cent of video sales remained DVD, with digital retail accounting for 22.4 per cent and Blu-ray following behind with 12.9 per cent. 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray sales now account for 12 per cent of that smaller Blu-ray market.

In total, more than 38million copies have been sold across all video formats (DVD, Blu-ray and Digital) over the past half-year, with *The Greatest Showman* alone breaking the million mark.

The barnstorming P.T. Barnum singalong has garnered sales in excess of 1.4m copies across all formats, moving it ahead of *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, which sold more than 1.03m copies, and *Paddington 2*, which happily munches marmalade sandwiches in third place with cross-platform sales of 835,000.

Other big-hitting titles include *Jumanji: Welcome To The Jungle*, which has scored sales of more than 600,000, and Marvel's *Black Panther*, which has pulled in superheroic sales in excess of 513,000.

On with the EST show

Electronic sell-through (EST) has grown 27 per cent, when aggregated across the various digital retail platforms available. According to the new BASE report, the average UK consumer spend across EST is steadily increasing and stands at £31.50.

Meanwhile, the all-conquering *The Greatest Showman* has also become the most successful digital title released in the UK, and is officially the first title to surpass



Liz Bales: 'Being able to access a film in your home, in the best possible quality, remains important to many'

digital sales of half a million. Other popular movies for digital buyers include *Justice League*, with more than 170,000 digital copies sold, *Fifty Shades Freed*, with more than 120,000 copies, and *Blade Runner 2049*, with more than 112,000 copies.

Elsewhere, the rapid rise of 4K UHD sales is good news for collectors and the AV industry in general. More than 250 titles have been released on the UHD format since its introduction in 2016. Significantly, the amount of money spent has also grown by three percentage points. The trade association notes that the average price of Blu-ray discs has also increased by 7.8 per cent over the past six months.

Premium experiences

Unsurprisingly, Robert Price, Chairman of BASE and MD of Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, is happy. 'There is much to be positive about when considering the performance of the home entertainment sector so far in 2018, especially in the context of a challenging trading environment and unsteady consumer confidence.'

'As an industry we must ensure our relevance to audiences sustains. We need to capitalise on successes where we see them and be bold and collaborative in approaching challenges and meeting the needs of a customer base still clearly very much in love with ownership and collection.'

Liz Bales, BASE Chief Executive, has a similar outlook. 'So far 2018 has seen the home entertainment sector benefit from consistently strong performance across a broad range of titles, underlining that audiences remain engaged with the category even as it adapts to changing viewing habits and tastes.'

'There's much to suggest that being able to access a film in your home, and in the best possible quality, remains important to many.'

The Greatest Showman's disc and download sales are worth making a song and dance about



This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 On-demand is in demand...

Ofcom's latest annual report reveals that subscription VOD services have overtaken more 'traditional' pay-TV services for the first time. According to the BARB Establishment Data it cites, the number of pay-TV subscriptions in the UK in Q1 2018 totalled 15.1m, while the total number of subscriptions to Netflix, Amazon Prime and NOW TV rose to 15.4m – although this includes subscriptions to multiple VOD services in the same household.

2 ...but Netflix shares drop

Despite the good news reported above, Netflix still saw its share price plunge by 14 per cent recently after missing yet another subscription growth target. The VOD service added just 670,000 new US subscribers in Q2 2018, a little over half of the 1.2m it had originally predicted. Oops!

3 Bigger and harder

Get ready for more action, more jokes and more outrageous silliness when Twentieth Century Fox unleashes the *Deadpool 2: Super Duper \$@!%# Cut* on Blu-ray and 4K Ultra HD on September 17. In addition to a 15-minute longer edit of the film, fans can look forward to a commentary, deleted/extended scenes, alternate takes and a bunch of *Making of...* featurettes.

4 BBC scores with 4K trials

The BBC has declared its 4K Ultra HD World Cup and Wimbledon trials a success after receiving over 1.6m live streaming requests across the two sporting events. The Beeb says it delivered around 20,000 4K streams for most World Cup matches, rising to roughly 35,000 for England games – and when these coincided with Wimbledon it peaked at 60,300 4K streams at the same time.

5 Solo blasts off on Blu-ray

As if September wasn't already looking expensive enough for film fans, with both *Deadpool 2* (above) and *Avengers: Infinity War* (right) making their home entertainment bow, we can also confirm that *Solo: A Star Wars Story* will be making its UK disc debut on September 24.

6 Logan tops UK complaints

The latest annual report from the BBFC shows that it received more complaints about *X-Men* spin-off *Logan* than any other film in 2017, with members of the public feeling the violence was too strong for a 15 certificate and that the film deserved to be rated 18 instead. However, the BBFC only received 20 such complaints about *Logan*, which is well down on previous years that saw the likes of *Deadpool* and *Spectre* receive between 40 to 50 complaints.

7 Xbox One adds Dolby Vision

A new system update (1810) for Microsoft's Xbox One and Xbox One S brings Dolby Vision support to the consoles. There is a bit of a catch, however, as it only applies to content streamed via Netflix and doesn't support Dolby Vision delivered by Ultra HD Blu-ray discs.

8 ISE relocates

The world's largest AV and systems integration show is heading to warmer climes. After 14 years at Netherlands' RAI Amsterdam, the ISE (Integrated Systems Europe) expo will be packing its bags and making a new home at the Gran Via in Spain's state-of-the-art Fira de Barcelona complex from 2021.

9 Deezer teams with Samsung

Music streaming service Deezer has joined forces with Samsung to make Deezer HiFi available on selected Samsung soundbars and wireless speakers, letting users stream uncompressed 16-bit/44.1kHz CD-quality audio. Visit www.deezer.com/en/offers/hifi for full details.

10 Infinity War comes home

Disney is bringing *Avengers: Infinity War* to DVD, BD, 3D and 4K in the UK on September 3. Extras will include four behind-the-scenes featurettes (*Strange Alchemy*, *The Mad Titan*, *Beyond the Battle: Titan* and *Beyond the Battle: Wakanda*); four deleted/extended scenes; a gag reel; and a filmmakers' commentary. Of course, if you can't wait that long, you could always import it from the US when it's released on August 14...



Premiere...

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

Back to the Clone Wars



It's been a decade since the *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* animated series (the only good thing to ever come out of the prequels) first hit the smallscreen – and four years since it was brought to an untimely end. But *The Clone Wars* is making a comeback to celebrate its 10th anniversary, with 12 new episodes that will wrap up unresolved storylines hitting Disney's upcoming streaming service.

Jones goes rogue

Warcraft director Duncan Jones took to Twitter to reveal he's hard at work on an adaptation of the 2000A.D. comic strip *Rogue Trooper*, about a blue-skinned super soldier on the hunt for the traitor who betrayed his squad.

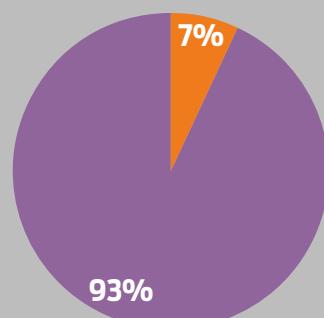
Zombie killers unite!

Emma Stone, Jesse Eisenberg, Woody Harrelson, Abigail Breslin and director Ruben Fleischer are reuniting for a sequel to the hit 2009 horror-comedy *Zombieland*. Look for it in cinemas next October.

We asked...

Is any part of your AV system voice-controlled?

- Yes, I love Alexa!
- No, shut up Google!



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

'My God, it's full of stars!'

2001: A Space Odyssey → Warner Bros. → Ultra HD Blu-ray

Stanley Kubrick's 1968 science-fiction masterpiece *2001: A Space Odyssey* will be blasting off on Ultra HD Blu-ray on October 29. Based on a new restoration of the 65mm original camera negative overseen by Christopher Nolan, the 4K disc will offer HDR10 and Dolby Vision HDR, plus a choice of a remixed DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack or the original six-track audio mix (reformatted for DTS-HD MA 5.1). It also comes bundled with a remastered HD presentation of the film, and a bonus disc housing seven documentaries and an audio interview with Kubrick, carried over from earlier releases.



300 SERIES



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Face to Face

Topics of discussion on the HCC Facebook page

On HCC daring to run a DVD competition...



DVD – how quaint!

Fondiest Steve

DVD? That is for savages surely?

Nigel Hyde

Quite. It's like a competition to win a cassette yet aimed at audiophiles.

Mike Henry

What you're watching on your home cinema...



Watched *Passengers* (the one with Chris Pratt and Jennifer Lawrence). Wanted

to see a mix between *The Martian* and *Cast Away* so this was a good choice.

Patrick Peeters

Interstellar and *Arrival*.

Roy King Jnr

Geostorm.

Mark West

Dr. No and *The Naked Gun 2 1/2*.
Walter White

The Back to the Future Trilogy.
Sebastian Fisher-Greene

Black Panther 4K, and *Rogue One* (again) to try and understand why a lot seem to think that it's the best of the sequels/prequels/spin-offs. Still don't get it.

Stu Barber



It has to be *Ready Player One* for the second time and maybe *Fury*.

Tony Mccluskey

Restored HD versions of *Death Laid an Egg*, *Lady Frankenstein* and *Django Kill*.

Alan Hoare

Nothing, too hot.

Andrew Creek

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Back of the 'net

Trailers, technology and more to check out on the web



Shattered dreams

Glass, the second sequel to M. Night Shyamalan's superhero fable *Unbreakable*, brings Samuel L. Jackson's villain back into the fold, alongside Bruce Willis's super-strong David Dunn and James McAvoy's split-personality baddie. Due in cinemas in January 2019, but there's already a trailer.

youtu.be/95ghQs5AmNk



Audio evolution

Nuraphone is tweaking its hybrid in-ear/over-ear 'self learning' headphones with second-generation software. Dubbed Nuraphone G2, and downloadable via the Nura app, new features include active noise cancelling, and a Social Mode that uses the headphones' microphones to let in external sounds.

www.nuraphone.com



Anthem goes stereo

Anthem Electronics, well known by AV fans for its multichannel receivers/processors, has announced its STR range of two-channel devices (amp, pre-amp and integrated amp) – the latter two featuring its Anthem Room Correction calibration/EQ and bass management. Here's an intro vid.

youtu.be/7N0Lgi988Zk



Joystick junkies rejoice

Retro Games has released a slimmed-down £70 version of the Commodore 64 (for youngsters: a 1980s computer). The C64 Mini does away with the tape deck and instead features 64 pre-loaded titles (including classics *Speedball II* and *California Games*). You can even get programming in BASIC too.

thec64.com

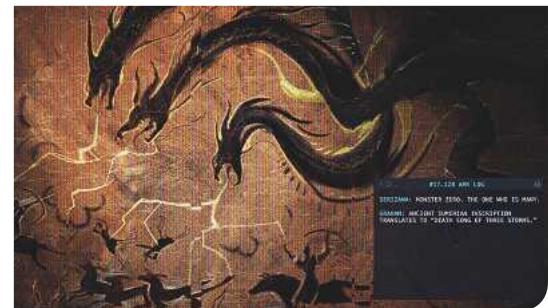
TOP PICK



Merman! Merman!

Jason Momoa takes to the water for the standalone DC flick *Aquaman* directed by James Wan, in theatres this December. Judging from Warner's debut trailer, it looks like being an absolutely gorgeous slice of comic book cinema. Does the DCEU revival start here?

youtu.be/WDkg3h8PCVU



Roar power

Godzilla: King of the Monsters won't come ashore until next Spring, but Legendary Pictures has already launched a teaser website that lets you play the role of a nosy Monarch scientist investigating beastly sightings around the globe. It took us ages to find Ghidorah...

www.monarchsciences.com

To infinity and beyond

Elipson Infinite Series → www.elipson.com

Described as 'high-performance, dedicated home theatre speakers for the serious AV enthusiast', Elipson's new Infinite Series features two loudspeaker models – the £1,500 Infinite LCRS 14 (pictured) and Infinite SR 8 (£900) – plus the 12in passive Infinite Sub 12 (£1,550) and A1000 Amp (£1,350). All are designed to be fitted either in-wall or on-wall, with brackets and templates supplied.



The smaller SR 8s (below) are suited to surround channel use



Focal focuses on home cinema

French speaker manufacturer Focal may be best known for its traditional hi-fi products, but the company also has movie rooms firmly in its sights.

Daniel Sait takes a look at the products and the technologies driving this new direction

ASK A UK hi-fi enthusiast to name a French loudspeaker firm and Focal will probably be the one they go for. Based in Saint-Étienne in south-east France, since the late 1970s it has been turning out towering speakers that look like an audiophile's dream, with names such as Utopia. But those looking a little closer will have noticed Focal spreading its wings.

Starting five years ago with plans to offer more home cinema-focused products, Focal has endeavoured to create a range that delivers as much versatility as possible to AV system builders. Its Custom Integration line now includes the entry-level 100 Series (launched this year); the existing 300 Series with new products added this year; and the top-end Electra 1000 BE, which is promising additions later in 2018. All three series offer in-wall and in-ceiling options, with round or square paintable grilles.

Tour of duty

The reason I was in Saint-Étienne was to hear the newest 300 Series arrival in action, but my listening session was preceded by a tour of Focal's manufacturing facility, which has been expanded in recent years to accommodate larger and more high-tech areas. With around 250 staff – including a 30-strong R&D team – the company is proud that it designs and manufactures products in-house.

Some of these processes cost a lot of time and money, as reflected in the ticket prices of Focal's premium hi-fi speakers. Take, for example, the efforts poured into the creation of its beryllium tweeter. This took four years of development, says Focal, before it was included in any of its speakers, but it believes the performance delivered has been worth it.

These tweeters are created in a special 'white room' part of the Focal plant, where the highest



The 300IWLCR6 uses Flax bass and midrange drivers, plus an aluminium-magnesium inverted dome tweeter

levels of climate control are needed. Those working in the area wear full hazmat suits to prevent contamination of the material, as if they've stepped off the set of a sci-fi flick.

Some of what goes on in the room is, I'm told, top-secret, but in short what Focal is doing is taming a substance that is incredibly stiff but incredibly light (each cone weighs just 45mg), giving these high-frequency drivers an extremely fast and accurate response. The beryllium used in the process is just one micron in diameter, thinner than a human hair.

Focal underlines how efficient beryllium is at moving sound by asking you to imagine long tubes of different metals, and to think how far sound might travel down these tubes in one second. I'm told beryllium's nearest rival, aluminium-magnesium, manages an impressive 5.18 kilometres, but beryllium delivers 12.4 kilometres.

Another component the company is proud of is its patented 'Power Flower' magnet assembly. This array uses several double-stacked ferrite rings, on a circular open pattern regularly distributed around the voice coil (in a shape somewhat reminiscent of a daisy). This technique claims more power than conventional approaches, and more efficient cooling properties.

Much of Focal's manufacturing equipment is bespoke, and these tools are combined with human hands, eyes and hearing. This approach is evident when witnessing how the company creates its

Focal's EQI (Easy Quick Install) system means the speaker slots in-wall, tool-free



top-of-the range 'W' drivers. Formed using a cone that sandwiches glass-fibre and a foam core, the substances are fused together using a custom moulding machine. Engineers are on hand to inspect each cone as it's created; keeping air out of the seal between the two substances is key as the materials start out relatively soft but harden into the familiar cone shape during the process. Driver properties can be tweaked by the amount of time spent inside the treatment chamber. More time equals a stiffer cone.

As the cones are shaped ready for assembly, machines such as laser cutters are employed but always with a human eye on what is going on. And Focal says this becomes critical when applying the various adhesives that bond different parts of the speaker together. Extra mass is something that all manufacturers try to avoid.

Once the driver is complete, it's time to test. Focal has measuring systems to analyse the reaction of each unit created, but nothing gets approved until a golden-eared audio engineer has given it the nod.

Focal joins the 100 club

The new 100 Series is Focal's compact option for small/medium-sized rooms. Its three standard in-wall/in-ceiling models, the 100ICW5, 100ICW6 and 100ICW8, offer 5in, 6in and 8in coaxial drivers respectively, with basket and driver designed as a single unit to reduce their footprint. Also in the 100 Series are a coaxial in-ceiling stereo loudspeaker (100IC6ST), an in-ceiling model with downward-angled drivers (100ICLCR5), and a pair of two-way models aimed at in-wall/centre channel use (100IW6, 100IWLCR5).

The 300 Series is where Focal's installation range gets really interesting. Here, mid and bass drivers are hewn from environmentally friendly Flax, and joined by a bespoke aluminium-magnesium inverted dome tweeter. The 300 Series also delivers an installation approach that means that, apart from cutting space for the speaker, no tools are needed. New for 2018 are the 300IW6, 300IWLCR6 and 300ICLCR5 speakers, which have joined the existing 300ICW4, 300ICW6 and 300ICW8 [see *HCC* #286] models.



Focal's current hi-fi range includes Utopia III Evo, Sopra and Electra 1000 BE floorstanding models

The IWLCR6 is the range-topper, a sizable £800 three-way design ripe for LCR placement (its central mid-range/tweeter module is rotatable through 90 degrees for centre channel use). From its performance in Focal's demo room, it seems particularly impressive, reaching high SPLs and conveying astonishing punch and detail.

Making sure its custom integration speakers can work well with its floorstanding products is a priority for the brand. So, the 100 Series uses Polyglass cones to match Focal's Chorus line, the Flax drivers of the 300 compliment the Aria and Kanta ranges, and 'W' drivers of the premium Electra models are also found in the Electra, Sopra and Utopia floorstanders.

For those with no interest in fitting in-wall and in-ceiling units, the company also continues to offer its Sib Evo Dolby Atmos system, released last Summer [reviewed in *HCC* #276]. Working with the minimum layout needed to create a cinematic Atmos experience (5.1.2), but expandable with additional stereo pairs, this array bundles two satellites, two Sib Evo upfiring Dolby Atmos speakers and Cub Evo subwoofer.

Focal says global sales have been extremely good, highlighting how important Atmos is to home cinema enthusiasts, and urges fans of the system to watch out for further Atmos-dedicated models. Perhaps an obvious development would be a floorstanding design, or maybe a soundbar spin-off. I'll guess we'll just have to wait and see... ■

The manufacturing processes include hand-finishing and quirky costumes...



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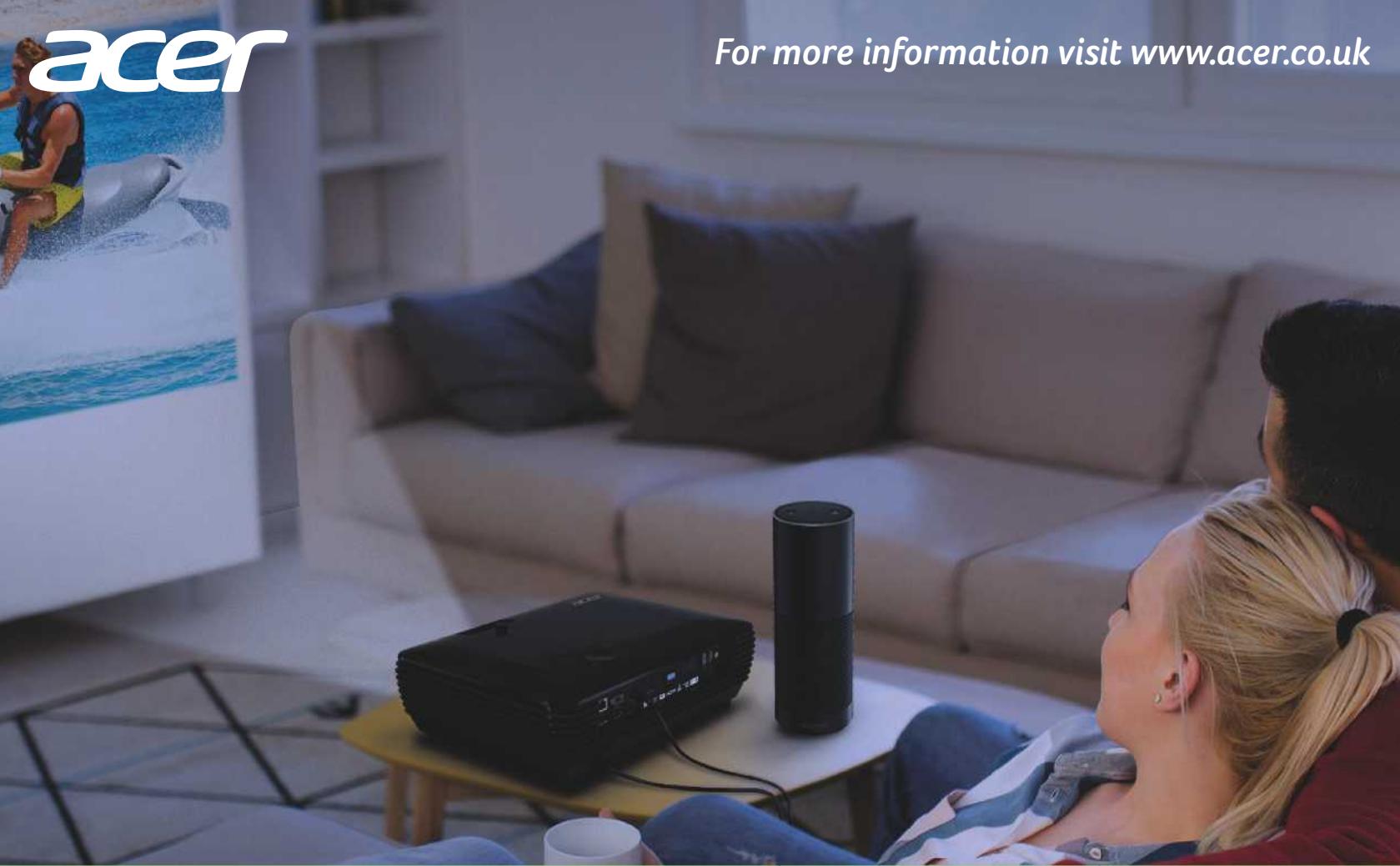
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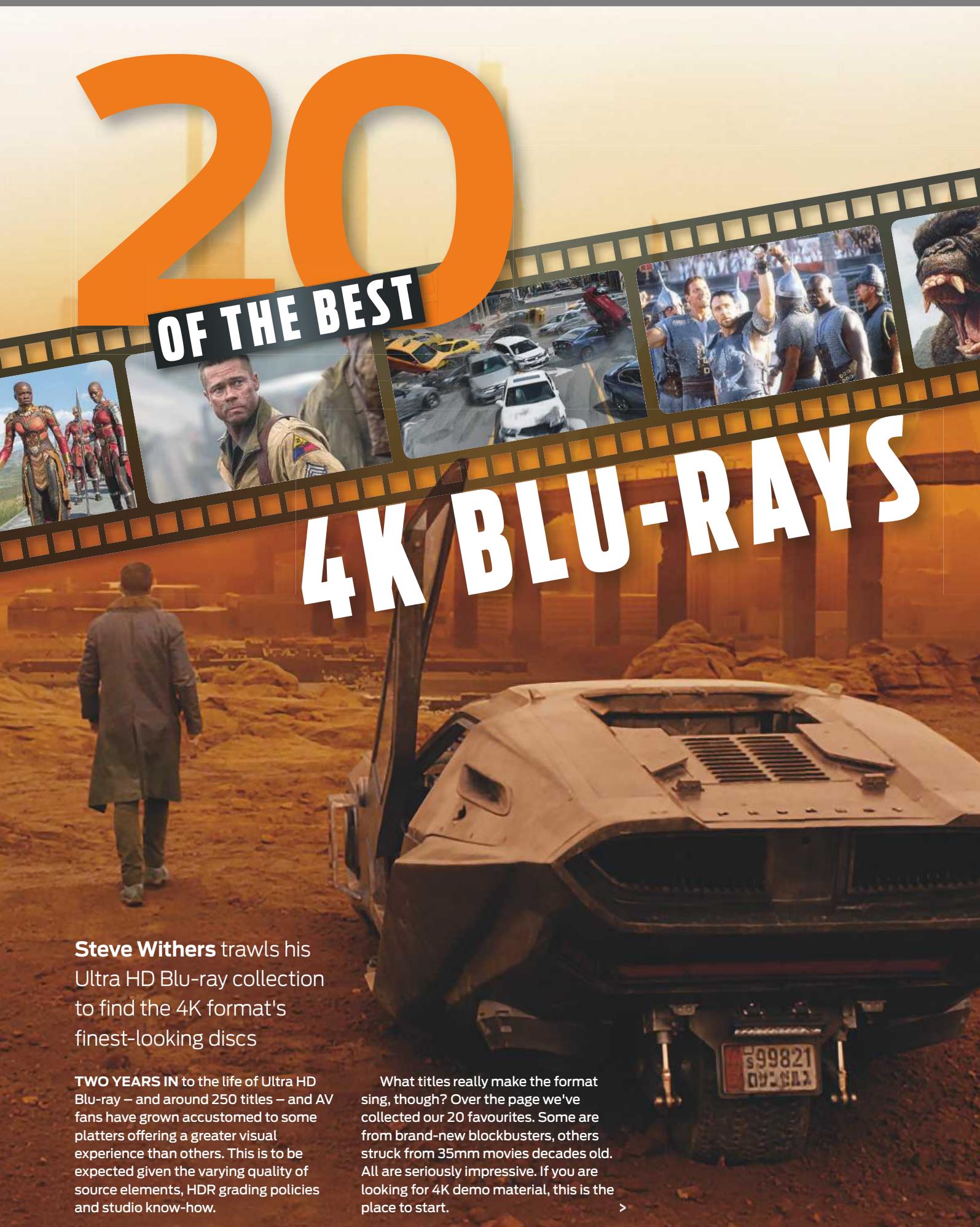
4K BLU-RAYS



Steve Withers trawls his Ultra HD Blu-ray collection to find the 4K format's finest-looking discs

TWO YEARS IN to the life of Ultra HD Blu-ray – and around 250 titles – and AV fans have grown accustomed to some platters offering a greater visual experience than others. This is to be expected given the varying quality of source elements, HDR grading policies and studio know-how.

What titles really make the format sing, though? Over the page we've collected our 20 favourites. Some are from brand-new blockbusters, others struck from 35mm movies decades old. All are seriously impressive. If you are looking for 4K demo material, this is the place to start. >





Die Hard

Die Hard gets an explosive Ultra HD disc release courtesy of a 4K restoration of the original 35mm camera negative. This image takes a bazooka to previous releases – the cinematography suffers from excessive use of filters in the early scenes, but once the action moves to Nakatomi Plaza it's simply stunning. You can enjoy all the late '80s decor and clothes, while also noticing details you'd never seen before.

Blacks are deep, shadow detail is excellent and HDR highlights give gunshots and explosions real impact. Colours are superb, with a deliberate orange push in the opening sunset scenes, accurate flesh tones, and some excellent use of primaries in the film's production design. The transfer is clean and free of artefacts, too. Yippee ki-yay, indeed.



Fast & Furious 8

The latest F&F flick vrooms on to 4K Blu with a fantastic transfer that makes full use of all the benefits of HDR (including Dolby Vision). Shot digitally at 3.4K, with effects finished at 2K, the resulting transfer shows no sign of compression issues. There's a surge in detail compared to the BD, readily apparent in close-ups, wide shots, and every bead of sweat on The Rock's shaved head, while the wider colour gamut is striking during the opening Cuba street race, and explosions peppered throughout the film have plenty of punch. The final-act snow-bound heroics are an HDR showcase. A great example of how good a modern blockbuster can look.



Kong: Skull Island

This set out to meld King Kong and Apocalypse Now, and to a large extent was successful. It's a beautiful film to look at, with stylised photography and vivid colours. Warner's UHD BD captures the filmmakers' intentions, and HDR allows all those saturated hues to shine – colours are dominated by greens and browns, but there are bright-red sunsets and a neon-green haze covering the ape graveyard. Highlights can be picked out with ease, especially sunlight glinting off metal objects, while the flames used to trap Kong almost feel hot.



What's next?

Movies that are on our 4K Blu-ray wish-list

Jaws



Steven Spielberg's finest hour was an annoyingly late arrival to Blu-ray, and once again we're waiting when it comes to UHD.

Star Wars: The Original Trilogy

We've no doubt fans would queue up to view George Lucas's sci-fi saga in 4K HDR. Maybe when the Fox/Disney corporate takeover is resolved, we'll get the chance.

The Wizard of Oz

This 1939 Technicolor classic was apparently scanned at 8K for its 2009 70th Anniversary Blu-ray. Next year would seem like the perfect opportunity for an 80th anniversary 4K outing, with a wide colour Yellow Brick Road.



John Wick

You can't beat an old-school revenge movie: the hero gets wronged and then kills everyone responsible. John Wick arrived as a breath of fresh air in 2014, and the film was a visual *tour de force*, one that's perfectly replicated by the UHD release. It was shot digitally at 2.8K and finished at 4K, the disc using this source to deliver a first-class 2.40:1 image.

The photography has a very deliberate colour scheme and the use of HDR lets these bold choices pop, creating a sumptuous, comic book aesthetic. Detail levels are exceptional and carried into the shadows, while crisp whites are bold and true. This is a superb 4K disc, so find John Wick before he finds you.

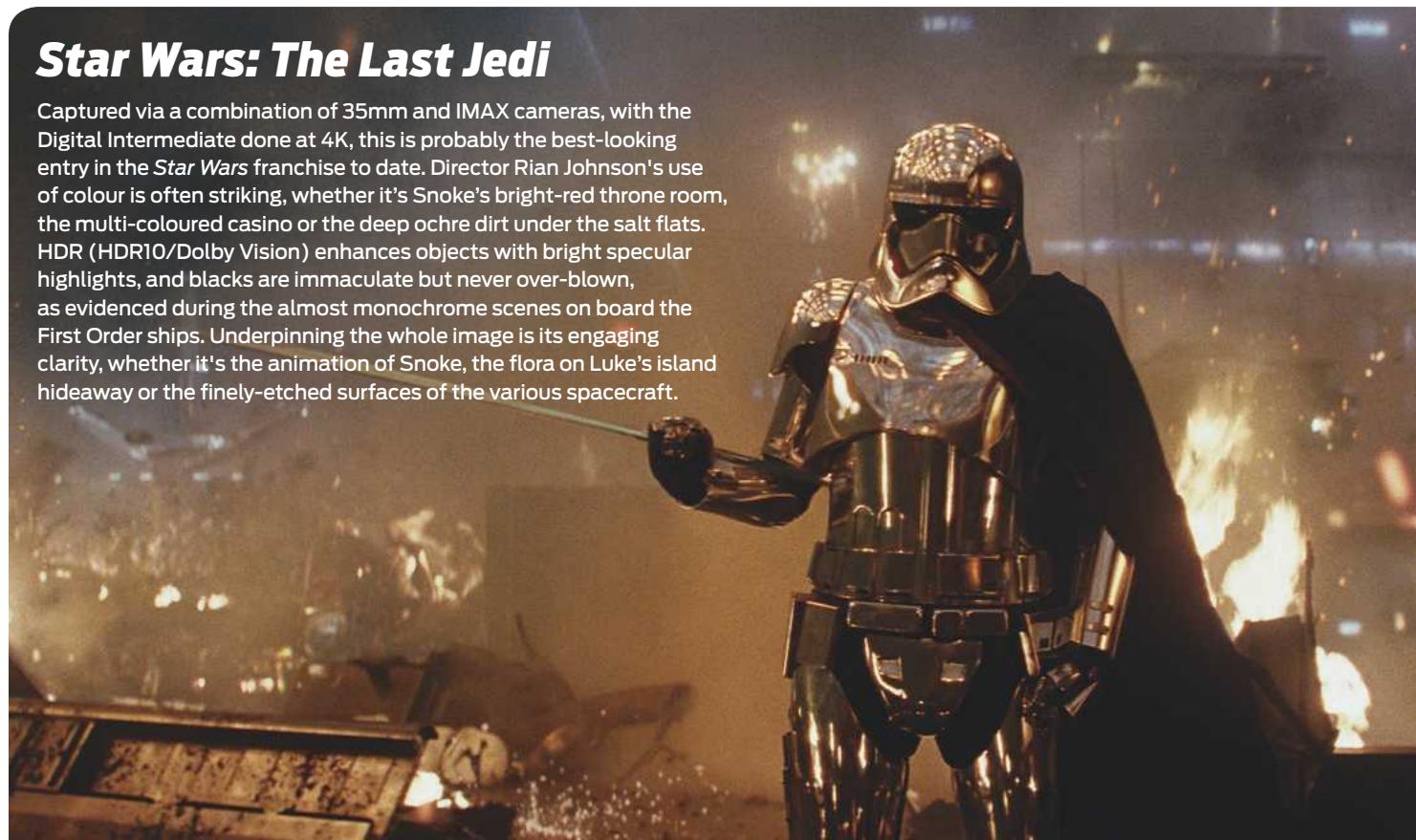
Passengers

This intriguing sci-fi boasts an all-round image offering scene after scene of demo-worthy material. The film was lensed at 5.1K and finished using a 4K DI. This yields a native 4K image – and you can really tell; there's an astonishing refinement here that shows off the film's production design and SFX. The HDR is also superb, with the blacks of space dotted with stars and the bright strips of the ship's lighting adding a layer of realism. Some sequences are brightly lit, revealing extensive amounts of detail without any clipping, while darker scenes retain pixel info. The palette varies skilfully from natural flesh tones to saturated colours in the ship's bar.



Star Wars: The Last Jedi

Captured via a combination of 35mm and IMAX cameras, with the Digital Intermediate done at 4K, this is probably the best-looking entry in the *Star Wars* franchise to date. Director Rian Johnson's use of colour is often striking, whether it's Snoke's bright-red throne room, the multi-coloured casino or the deep ochre dirt under the salt flats. HDR (HDR10/Dolby Vision) enhances objects with bright specular highlights, and blacks are immaculate but never over-blown, as evidenced during the almost monochrome scenes on board the First Order ships. Underpinning the whole image is its engaging clarity, whether it's the animation of Snoke, the flora on Luke's island hideaway or the finely-etched surfaces of the various spacecraft.





Apollo 13

Ron Howard's flick about the disastrous Apollo 13 moon mission is a thrilling story of ingenuity over adversity. The Ultra HD Blu-ray is equally clever, based on a stellar 4K restoration of the original Super 35 negative. Universal's transfer reveals every layer of the film's exacting production design and offers a clear improvement over the 1080p disc, with the wider colour gamut evident in the saturated 1970s-era palette.

HDR deployment really impresses too, as the exceptionally deep blacks of space are juxtaposed with blindingly bright sunlight. There's clearly more detail in the shadows, emphasising the cramped conditions, while the astronauts' white overalls appear freshly laundered. There's a healthy layer of grain but otherwise this is an artefact-free image, and the best the movie has ever looked. *Apollo 13* might famously have had a problem, but the same isn't true of this excellent 4K release.



Blade Runner

Blade Runner is one of the most influential sci-fi films ever, its rain-drenched cityscapes evoking dystopian visions of the future. The movie had a full restoration when director Ridley Scott created his Final Cut in 2007, with 35mm elements scanned at 4K, and 65mm effects shots scanned at a staggering 8K. The resulting 4K transfer is nothing short of a revelation for a film of this vintage.

Its action takes place entirely at night, but this disc breezes through, boasting stable blacks, superb near-black definition, and neon signs that really ping. Film grain is well-handled, and the exquisite model work stands up. HDR adds a layer of beauty to Scott's frequent shafts of light. Watching this platter is like seeing the film for the first time; tears in rain have never looked so good.



Blade Runner 2049

We had to wait 35 years for a *Blade Runner* sequel but it was worth it, partly because this is one of the most visually striking films in recent memory. The use of largescale models enhanced by CG gives the film the same sense of dystopian realism seen on the original, but on a grander scale, and this disc, with its incredibly clean image (derived from a 4K DI), puts it all there on screen.

The cinematography is often breathtaking, with bold colours (the orange hues of Las Vegas, the blues and greens of LA) perfectly rendered. It's often dark, too, but there's clarity amongst the murk thanks to the extended dynamic range. Highlights appear perfectly balanced. This is one 4K disc that's worth hunting down.



Guardians of the Galaxy Vol 2

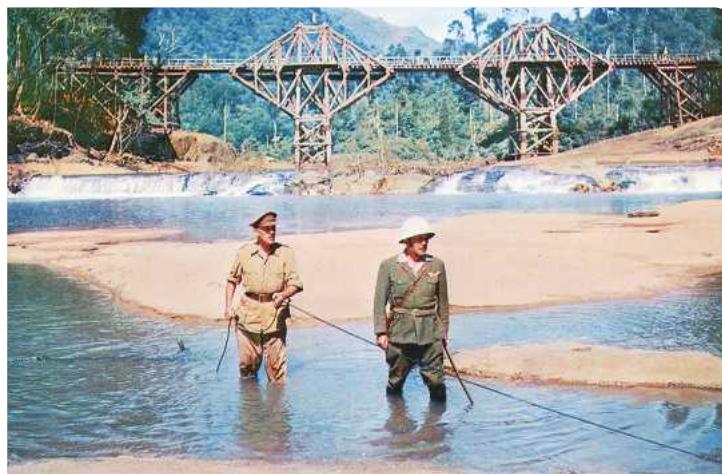
If you ever need a film to prove that a UHD disc doesn't need to be based on a native 4K source to impress, then this is the one for you. Disney's debut Ultra HD release, it's a snap-shot of the varied way Hollywood works – digitally photographed at 8K, but finished as a 2K DI. Ignore these numbers and focus on the visuals: this release is light years ahead of the regular BD, with better defined detail, a much greater dynamic range and a more extensive colour palette. Ogle at Rocket's fur, or the incredibly vivid hues on Ego's planet, or the piercing highlights of the laser blasts. It's an HDR demo reel, delivering on the full potential of the tech. As is often said, 4K is not just about more pixels but about better pixels – and these are the best.



Gladiator

This brutal epic has a checkered past on home video, but the UHD Blu-ray release more than makes up for previous transgressions – the newly restored 4K image, taken from the original 35mm camera negative, is a joy to behold. The pristine transfer has a pleasing layer of film grain and none of the noise reduction that marred earlier outings. There are no compressions issues or banding either, and the disc offers the choice of HDR10 or Dolby Vision.

Yes, some of the digital effects haven't aged well, but generally the picture looks superb. The opening battle is a case in point. There are natural colours boosted by the red of the centurions' cloaks and the yellow flames of the Roman 'napalm', plus filmic detail in spades and nuanced HDR. Sit back and soak it all in.



Bridge on the River Kwai

David Lean's WWII drama was originally released in 1957, making it the oldest title in this roundup. However, it's a great example of what an effective, painstaking 4K restoration (working from the original 35mm elements) is capable of delivering when combined with sympathetic use of HDR.

The increased detail and added dynamic range here are obvious, making the previous Blu-ray appear dull and blurry in comparison. There's a degree of film grain that's to be expected and cherished, and the transfer makes full use of the extra colour space; the palette is dominated by greens and browns, but varying shades and hues lend Jack Hildyard's Oscar-winning cinematography greater realism.

In fact the overall picture is so good that it's hard to believe this film is over 60 years old. The sharpness and clarity in some shots is often mind-blowing, and the carefully composed 2.55:1 photography looks stunning in 4K. This sets the benchmark for vintage releases.



Dunkirk

Not one to do things by half, Christopher Nolan's recreation of the famous war-time evacuation was shot using 65mm IMAX and Panavision cameras. Coupled with the 4K mastering, and you get an Ultra HD Blu-ray presentation that blows most rivals out of the water. The massed ranks of soldiers on beaches, the arrival of the 'little boats', and the aerial dogfights drip with realism, especially during the 1.78:1 IMAX sequences.

Colours are understandably muted considering the subject matter, but the image always appears natural, while HDR adds another level of believability. *Dunkirk* is an unconditional 4K success.



Black Panther

The opening jungle sequence in *Black Panther* will really push your display's capabilities. It's a dark scene, and only the best TVs can pull all the necessary shadow detail out of the image. The transfer includes Dolby Vision, and it's here that the format shows its worth, revealing the titular hero in all his glory.

Elsewhere, this comic caper's visuals burst with lush colours and clearly defined highlights. Via HDR the reflections on weapons and armour are especially pronounced, and Vibranium glistens with a metallic sheen. The 4K DI source ensures plenty of pixel punch too. An excellent UHD all-rounder.





Fury

This superior World War II drama boasts one of the best tank battles ever committed to film – and it's *Fury*'s 35mm origins that help yield an Ultra HD Blu-ray that'll blow you away like a 76mm gun.

The image appears film-like but with minimal grain, and there are no compression issues to distract. The naturalistic photography doesn't proffer a kaleidoscope of colour, but there's still beauty in the way it handles the dirt, dust and debris. HDR, meanwhile, gives *Fury* a visceral edge.

Explosions and flames have real depth, while tracer fire lights up the screen.



The Magnificent 7

This 2016 remake of the classic Western arrives with a strong UHD release that (like *GotG2*, p26) shows there's more to the format than a native 4K source. For that old-school vibe, director Antoine Fuqua used 35mm film cameras, yet the movie was finished at 2K. Despite this, it remains wonderfully sharp, delivering

a beautiful upgrade over the Blu-ray and gaining better definition thanks to the use of HDR, while offering a suitably film-like image. There's also a pleasingly natural appearance; everything from costumes and buildings to horses looks darn fine.

Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice

DC's superhero flick delivers some epic action, and its stylised photography emphasises the epic contrast that HDR thrives on. Inky blacks are joined by plenty of shadow detail (check out the layers to Batman's costume), and although the colour scheme is muted the disc allows for more subtle hues within the image to show through.

The grain structure changes from scene to scene (an effect of different film stocks employed) but IMAX sequences (such as the central Bat v Supes fight) are heroically clean and sharp. When a certain Amazonian warrior makes her first appearance, you'll gawp in wonder...

Close Encounters of the Third Kind

Steven Spielberg's sci-fi got the restoration treatment for its 40th anniversary, with new 4K masters created of all three versions of the film – images are so sharp you can see focus aberrations caused by the anamorphic lenses employed. Yet it's the sprinkling of HDR that has the bigger impact. The image gains greater dimensionality as headlights and torches jump off the screen, and the frequent bright beams of light obviously benefit from the increased dynamic range. Effects were shot on 65mm, leading to little in the way of image degradation, and the model work looks fantastic. Grainy? Yes – but also great.

What's next?

More movies that are on our 4K Blu-ray wish-list

Alien Quadrilogy



This series of extra-terrestrial horrors has already amassed a peerless collection of extras – we just need the 4K visuals.

The LOTR Trilogy

A 4K HDR re-release of this fantasy franchise would let Peter Jackson tinker with the colour timing all over again. And then we could argue about it once more.

Lawrence of Arabia

Long-considered the jewel in Sony Pictures' back-catalogue crown, and already boasting a sumptuous Blu-ray derived from a 4K scan, *Lawrence of Arabia* is surely due another physical release. You can view it in 4K via digital platforms while you wait.



Planet Earth II

One of the TV highlights of 2016, but also an opportunity to push the tech envelope, *Planet Earth II* was produced with 4K HDR in mind and this is brought to the fore by the UHD platter. Whether it's a close-up of an animal's skin or a vast mountainous landscape, these visuals (mostly derived from native 4K footage) are jaw-dropping. Shot composition is suited to HDR, with plenty of scenes where sunlight is streaming through foliage or backlighting a beastie. Yet whites remain brilliant, colours beautifully saturated, and blacks extremely deep. The sequence featuring hyenas at night is a great test of a TV's local dimming prowess.



The Revenant

A must-own disc from the earliest days of the format, and still deserving of its demo-quality status. Director Alejandro G. Iñárritu and cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki opted to shoot using natural light sources, meaning *The Revenant*'s HDR grade is key to delivering the filmmakers' intentions. The colour palette is dominated by icy whites, but skin tones are spot on and colours appear completely realistic. A search at night lit only by flaming torches is utterly beautiful, contrasting pitch blacks with an unearthly yellow glow – it's also a complete torture test for some TVs. Add in the fidelity of the image (the shot-on-6.5K source gives an almost hyper-realistic feel), and you have a remarkable visual achievement ■

THE GATEKEEPERS OF



MOVIES

Film fans have been donning funny spex for decades – the aim of the 3D Film Archive is to ensure the format's rich history isn't forgotten. We chat to its Technical Director **Greg Kintz**



Greg Kintz: 'Display manufacturers took the concept of 3D TV, threw it on the wall, and waited to see if it stuck...'

IS 3D DEAD? That depends on who you ask. TV manufacturers may think it's an obsolete technology, but the 3D TV boom earlier in this decade represents just a fraction of the format's history – a history that goes back more than 100 years. It's been 'dead' a few times before...

No organisation probably has a deeper understanding of the ups and downs of 3D as the 3D Film Archive. Established in 1990 in the US by stereoscopic movie expert Bob Furmanek, the Archive is dedicated to researching, locating, preserving and screening vintage 3D material, be it feature films or shorts. Its website (www.3dfilmarchive.com) is a treasure trove of information and investigation, with a focus on the format's 1950s Golden Age – when films including *Dial M for Murder*, *Creature From the Black Lagoon* and *House of Wax* were wowing audiences with their stereoscopic tricks – and the many now lost titles of the 1920s. It has also worked with US Blu-ray label Kino for its releases of films including *September Storm* and *The Mask* (pictured right), and with Universal on its 3D BD releases of *It Came From Outer Space* and *Revenge of The Creature* (out this August as part of a new ...Legacy Collection boxset).

Over to the 3D Film Archive's Technical Director, Greg Kintz, for a discussion of the format's past, present and future.



Even now, is there still a big back-catalogue of vintage 3D movies – from the 1950s, '60s and '80s – that haven't yet been released on 3D Blu-ray?

Oh yes! At this point we are only now starting to approach the halfway point of full-length features/shorts, and that's just from the 1952-1955 time period. There are far more than that when factoring in the various shorts and film-shot 3D titles from the 1960s to the 1990s.

Dial M for Murder was Alfred Hitchcock's first (and last) 3D movie



Are theatrical releases of 3D movies under threat now that TV makers and many Blu-ray labels appear to have given up on the format?

For today's Hollywood, it has always been a simple mathematical formula: do they still make money? When *Chicken Little* [2005] and the other first Real-D 3D projection systems hit the market, most theatrical chains only charged an average of 50 cents to a dollar more per ticket. Around the time period when *Alice in Wonderland* came out [2010], theatre chains started raising prices to \$1.50/\$2 or more for a 3D ticket compared to the 2D version. Ticket sales for 3D showings started to take a predictable hit, but on average even the lower-turnout 3D showings still pay for the conversion costs and make an additional profit. And for Hollywood bean counters, that works.

Yet 3D just doesn't seem to have the same reputation now as it did five, six years ago...

Two additional factors have caused an even further decline in 3D sales – poor use of 3D and improper presentations.

There are movies like *Avatar*, *The Walk*, *Life of Pi*, *Gravity*, *Jurassic World*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Thor: Ragnarok* and so on that have clearly used 3D as an asset, and those titles typically had higher 3D ticket sales due to word of mouth. But for every 3D title with some thought put into the system, there are just as many titles where 3D simply feels tacked on, neglected, or outright weak. There have been some 3D titles where the 3D effect was so weak you could almost get away without wearing 3D glasses.



House of Wax: 3D for dummies...

The 1950s witnessed the first 3D movie boom, accompanied by some exquisite artwork



The other very disturbing factor is presentation. With today's digital 3D theatrical systems, things should be pretty much auto-pilot. But mistakes happen and consumers often aren't savvy enough to know when things are wrong. I went to a showing of *Black Panther* and when the 3D trailers started, I could see shadowing in the right-eye view that darkened the top half of the right-eye image. I waited, thinking someone would complain. After two trailers I talked to a manager, whose finger was soon visible in the optical path on screen. No change in picture quality, so I leave the packed theatre and ask to see this in a different screen in 3D later. Skip ahead, and the first 3D trailer starts again. The image was in 3D, but the polarizer had not been engaged so everyone was seeing a double image, even with their 3D glasses on. Again I waited through two 3D trailers then finally complained. They eventually put the polarizer in line for proper 3D by the end of the trailers just before the main feature began.

The driving point here is: how many patrons in a given day, in cities around the world, see improper 3D presentations and are left with a bad experience, even if they don't know exactly what the problem was? And on more than one occasion, I've had theatre managers simply shrug and tell me: 'That's how 3D works with some people', or: 'Yep. That's 3D for ya.' In essence, they are shooting themselves in the foot.

So what do you think the future holds for 3D home entertainment?

I think display manufacturers took the concept of 3D TV, threw it on the wall, and waited to see if it stuck, so to speak. The first 3D TVs adhering to the 3D Blu-ray and HDMI 1.4 specs finally arrived in 2010/2011. The problem was they were overtly expensive, 3D glasses could cost up to \$100 a pair, and those pricey glasses were often incompatible with other 3D TVs, even with earlier models made by the same company.

Content was in woefully short supply, and I mean short supply literally for a few years. Display manufacturers would make deals with the studios. For example, if you bought a new Panasonic 3D TV, only then could you get a 3D Blu-ray of *Avatar*. Want *Alice in Wonderland* in 3D? That was a Sony 3D TV exclusive.

And the first displays had their own growing pains, with some being dark in 3D, or having excessive ghosting or crosstalk. Polarized 3D TVs addressed some of these issues, but the first polarized sets showed 3D content at half of its vertical resolution.

Things improved. The price of active 3D glasses dropped and standards for the most part were agreed upon. Displays slowly became better. Content became more abundant and the bundled exclusives ended. But display manufacturers had been watching what they threw up on the wall, and in their minds, in those critical first few years, it didn't stick. Vizio [US TV >

The 3D Film Archive has worked on the 3D BD releases for *Those Redheads From Seattle* (Kino Lorber) and *Revenge of the Creature* (Universal)



brand] dropped out of the 3D market in 2014. Samsung followed in 2015. LG bowed out in 2016.

But there were more 3D Blu-rays released in 2016 than in any previous year! When Target and Best Buy offered 3D Blu-ray exclusive versions of *Rogue One* in 2017, all copies in the US were sold out in just over a week, leaving stragglers the option of buying overseas or paying \$60+ on eBay. That was often the case, with 3D versions of *Kong: Skull Island* or *Guardians of the Galaxy* being back-ordered as not enough in-store copies were made available.

If you visited forums, many of those who bought the 4K/3D combo sets that were briefly offered and had both 3D and 4K/HDR playback would compare the 'new' 4K/HDR version to the 'fading' 3D version and still prefer the 3D version.

It seems 4K and HDR are the all-new 'reasons to buy' for the industry, and the irony is with 4K/3D displays, full 1080p per eye polarized is finally possible. And with HDR pushing displays for increased higher light output, the rare 4K/3D OLEDs are some of the best 3D displays to date.

Quality 3D TVs can fetch extremely high prices nowadays, and some projector companies that initially ditched 3D in favour of 4K have added 3D back to their newer models. Many of those with VR headsets are just now discovering 3D Blu-ray, as they are already viewing in stereoscopic 3D.

So 3D lives on?

In many circles it has a black eye, and I get that, for all of the reasons mentioned above. Technology and perception is a funny thing, and who knows, there may be a decent auto-stereoscopic display, or other low-cost 3D display option, around the corner where people may look at the infrastructure like 3D Blu-ray and the HDMI 1.4 3D standards and say: 'Wow, most of the hardest work is already done.' The first publicly shown 3D test footage was in 1915, so it only took about 100 years to finally get the delivery infrastructure right.

Some perceive this as the end of 3D, but I remember just a decade ago when there were no 3D standards in place. No titles were available. And all of the 3D hardware, even the horribly expensive and quirky displays, were sub-par and often built to order. Murky red and blue anaglyph 3D experiments would occasionally pop up every decade or so, and always quickly go away. So from my perspective,

we have theatrical and consumer stereoscopic options in place where none had existed just over 15 years ago. It took 65 years for some of these titles to finally be shown properly again. And not only are there younger fans who are still appreciating today's 3D, a good number are discovering the older titles we've worked on restoring. They see how the 3D is often superior to what's seen today, so these people put their money in their passions, meaning our titles have a following which ensures even more long-lost 3D classics are in the pipeline.

What's your favourite 3D movie?

Like any movie, it depends on one's given mood at the time combined with desired genre. For me, sci-fi has always been one of my favourite genres. I'd seen *It Came From Outer Space* and *Creature From the Black Lagoon* on television quite a bit as a kid and a few years later found out they were shot in 3D. Bob [Furmanek] and I were recently both fortunate to have handled the 3D remastering for *It Came From Outer Space* as well as aiding the upcoming 4K 3D restoration of the *Revenge of the Creature*, as both titles had issues that needed addressing. With *Revenge...* we worked directly with Universal's restoration team, which has done some incredible work on the original archival elements. I've no doubt it continued to refine the scanned elements well after our part was completed and, like everyone else, I can't wait to see the final version.

As far as recent 3D titles go, there are some that are done well, but only a few have really understood the art form. I personally like a feature with an implementation that really says 'This is a must-see movie in 3D.' One of the best was Robert Zemeckis's *The Walk*, as the three-dimensional depth really enhances the feel of the World Trade buildings, the enormous scale of the towers, and sense of vertigo during the final act. No matter how large the screen it just isn't the same in 2D. The two *Guardians of the Galaxy* features also seemed to grasp the need for a deeper 3D experience, and off-screen effects could be quite visceral at times without being gimmicky. I could name more, but the most recent 3D title that utilised the process well was *Ant-Man and the Wasp*, as stereoscopics helped better convey proper space throughout the feature, be it in giant form or microscopic ■

Back in black

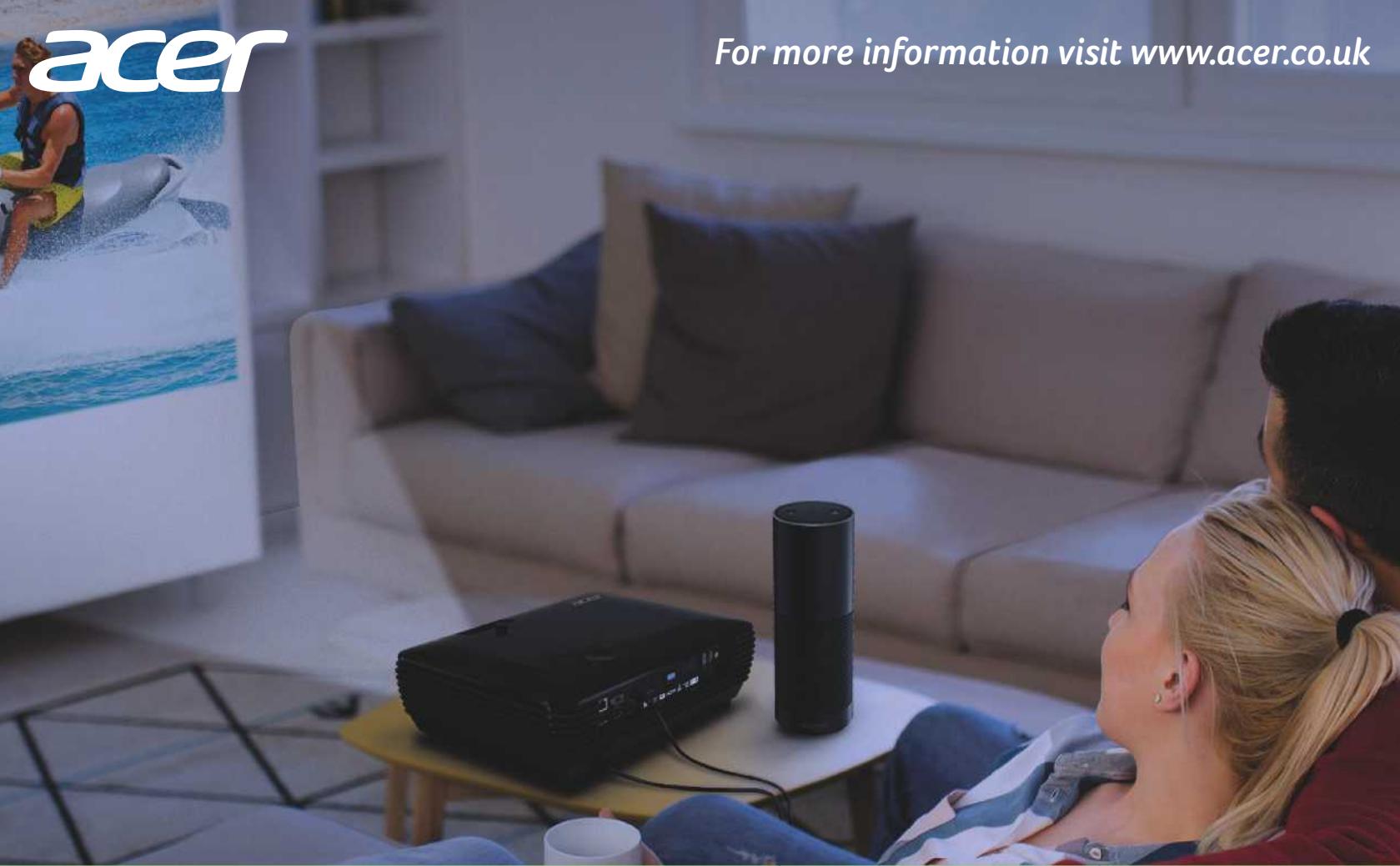
A new BD boxset collects a trio of creature features – two of them in 3D



Creature From the Black Lagoon (1954) and *Revenge of the Creature* (1955) were the only 'classic monster' movies made in 3D by Universal Pictures, and followed by a 2D sequel – *The Creature Walks Among Us* – in 1956. All three films are coming to Blu-ray in the US in a *Complete Legacy Collection* Blu-ray boxset.

Creature From the Black Lagoon has already had a standalone 3D Blu-ray release, but this marks the stereoscopic debut of its follow-up – bar some earlier anaglyph outings.

Extras on the set, in shops from August 28, are the *Back to the Black Lagoon* retrospective documentary, production photographs and a trio of commentary tracks.



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Brightness

A passion for pictures

Efficient frame interpolation and well-integrated LFE were on the detailed wish-list for this basement home cinema.

Mark Craven marvels at the finished project



KIT CHECKLIST

JVC: D-ILA X790R projector
KEF: 3 x Ci5160RL-THX in-wall speakers;
4 x Ci3160RL-THX in-wall speakers; 2 x Ci200RR-
THX in-ceiling speakers
SVS: 2 x SB13-Ultra subwoofers (concealed in-wall)
MARANTZ: AV8802 AV processor; MM8077 and
MM7055 power amplifiers
BOSE: ControlSpace ESP-88 DSP unit
SONY: UBP-X1000ES 4K Blu-ray player
BT: YouView PVR
CONTROL4: System automation
FRONTROW: 7 x cinema recliners



A raised floor was constructed for the second row of cinema seating. Behind, on the rear wall, space has been allocated for installing the JVC projector

THIS WELL-DRESSED CINEMA room, converted from a basement space by UK installer The Pyramid Group, had to meet the demands of its film fanatic owners, husband and wife Bruce and Hilary. They wanted super-sized visuals and immersive audio, but had specific hardware requirements in mind. For instance, the JVC projector was selected (after demonstrations) as it was felt to have superior, artefact-free frame interpolation – a concern of Bruce as he counts himself susceptible to 24fps judder. Speaker specification was equally important – while a hidden finish was desired, previous experience of in-wall speakers/subwoofers hadn't impressed. More demos followed, with an eventual combination of KEF THX-certified Ci series models, and SVS subwoofers, forming a 7.2.2 array calibrated to reach 105dB at the listening position.

Starry, starry night

Power and processing comes from Marantz AV separates (with an additional Bose DSP engine in the signal chain to tweak the LCR crossovers), and a BT YouView PVR and Sony 4K spinner are among the sources. A Control4 system provides the *de rigueur* smart operation of hardware and lighting – the latter including floor-level illumination, an LED run around the ceiling soffit, and an eye-catching star-field.

Naturally, the room's 135in projector screen has been getting a lot of use, but Bruce has also found the cinema an ideal space to feed his music passion: 'I had originally thought that I would not want to listen to music in a windowless room, and so was not concerned with that aspect,' he says. 'But we ended up bi-amping the front in-wall speakers to improve their performance further, and I have to admit I am frequently to be found sitting in the dark listening to CDs! The system actually exceeds my expectations, and to my ear is really, really good!' ■

A. Wall-to-wall video

A 1.78:1 aspect ratio was deemed the best fit for the owners' varied TV and movie viewing habits. The 135in PJ screen takes up most of the front wall, used in conjunction with the 4K HDR-compatible JVC D-ILA X790R

B. Take a tablet

Rather than juggle multiple remotes, an iPad (with Control4 interface) is on hand



Passive in-wall subs were ignored in favour of two active, sealed SVS SB13-Ultra models. Both were eventually concealed in the front wall





C. Finishing touch

While the choice of black for walls and furnishings helps ensure a cinematic experience, this star ceiling adds a level of luxury lighting

D. The perfect spot

Seven Front Row recliners – already bought by the owners – are split over two rows. We'd race to grab the middle one at the front, though...

E. Tonal balance

KEF's Uni-Q coaxial driver is a feature across all the cinema's speakers. Ci3160RL-THX models are used for the four surround channels

F. UHD on tap

Both the Sony disc player and BT YouView PVR provide 4K content

G. Doubling up on power

The Marantz seven-channel MM8077 and five-channel MM7055 power amplifiers deliver grunt to the room's nine passive speakers – plus allow for the LCR models to be bi-amped



Swish, Swiss cinema

Daniel Sait reports on a continental movie den where 4K films are thrown large and you don't have to go far to grab a drink



KIT CHECKLIST

SONY: VPL-VW550ES 4K projector

SCREEN EXCELLENCE: 130in 2.4:0:1 projector screen, with acoustically transparent material

ARTCOUSTIC: 3 x Spitfire 16-8s; 4 x Architect In-Wall 4-2 SLs; 2 x 40-30 4-2 SLs; 2 x Spitfire Control 3 subwoofers; PA-750 amplifier

SONY: UBP-X700 Blu-ray player

DENON: AVR-X7200 receiver

CONTROL4: EA-1 controller; SR-260 remote

LUTRON: Intelligent lighting



BASED IN IRELAND in the town of Dundalk, County Louth, install outfit Luxavo carried out this eye-catching and stylish cinema – in Switzerland. The original idea of the owner had been to simply put a largescreen TV on the wall rather than use a projector, but after some consultations, the movie room took on a more complete approach.

The ceiling was fitted with acoustic plasterboard to help with sound containment, an Artcoustic 5.1.4 Dolby Atmos speaker package was culled from the brand's Spitfire range (with height channels installed in a drop ceiling), and a 130in Screen Excellence screen was selected to grace the front wall. Providing power and processing is a Denon AVR-X7200 receiver, while the Sony VPL-VW550ES Ultra HD projector was chosen because it's 'the best available at the price point', according to Luxavo's Cormac Clifford. System automation is via Control4 hardware.

The room has a rear bar area, as it doubles as an entertainment space. But, says Clifford: 'If it's movie time, the lights dim, curtains open and the screen becomes visible. People are blown away.' ■

A. Back to bass

Behind this 130in projector screen sit the room's LCR speakers, plus dual subwoofers

B. Lighting the way

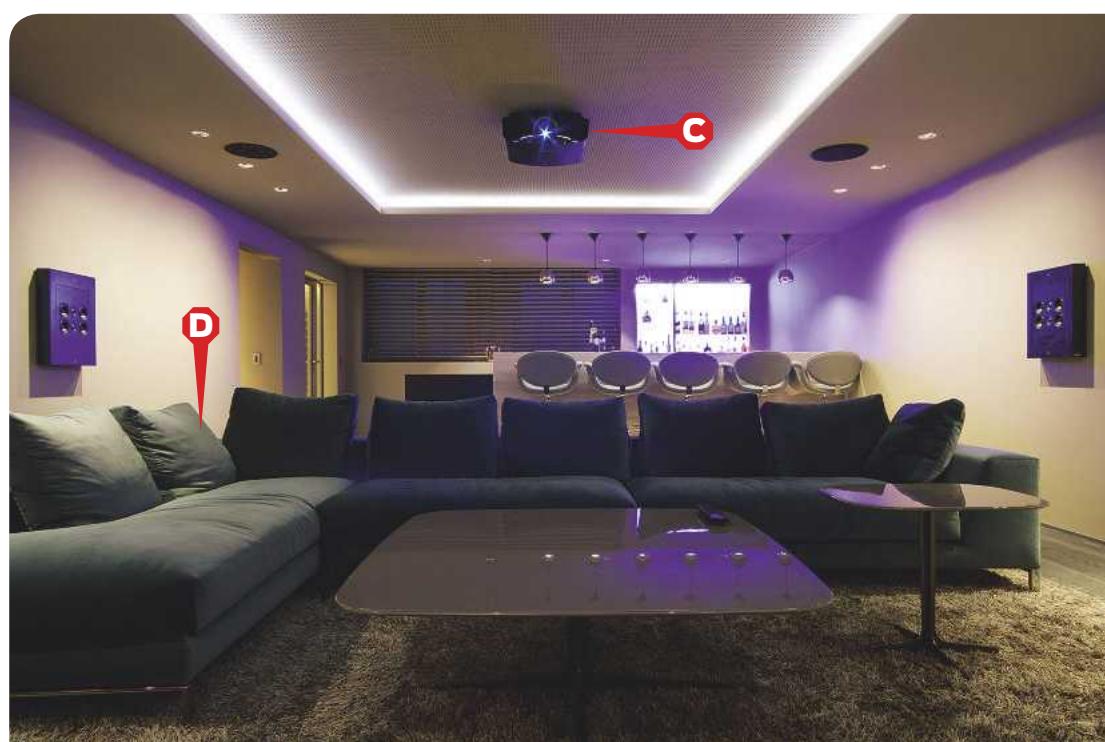
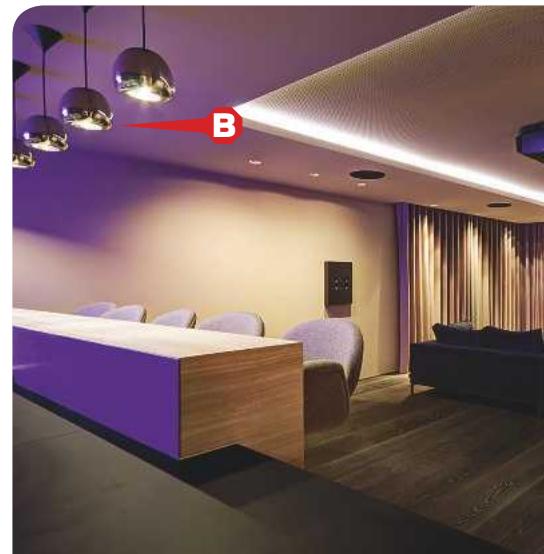
Lighting fixtures from Swiss corp Neuco are coupled with Lutron control. 'This allows the client to create some superb atmospheres,' says the installer

C. No TV, no problem

Initial plans for a flatscreen TV were jettisoned in favour of a more cinematic projection system. Handling 4K HDR visuals from the room's BD player is this ceiling-mounted Sony VPL-VW550ES

D. Come on over

Rather than the traditional recliners, the cinema offers plenty of sofa space plus stools at the bar





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REVIEWS

→ **HARDWARE** PHILIPS 4K HDR OLED TV with Ambilight **OPTOMA** Affordable Full HD/3D projector **SONY** HT-ZF9 Dolby Atmos soundbar **PANASONIC** Hollywood-tuned OLED **POLK AUDIO** 5.1-channel wireless soundbar system **AMAZON** Echo Spot smart AI speaker **MONITOR AUDIO** Range-topping Controlled Performance install speaker & **MORE**

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1

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Mark Craven experiences Perfect Natural Reality via Philips' super-powered 2018 OLED TV

Philips plays with pixels

The 803 OLED is the latest Philips OLED TV to hit the UK, following last year's 9002. Available at both 55in and 65in (the 9002 was 55in only), it aims to build upon its predecessor's strong reputation while undercutting most rivals, courtesy of a launch price of £2,000 for the 55in version auditioned here.

This new model employs a 2018 OLED panel, supplied by manufacturing giant LG Display. As well as utilizing a different anti-reflection layer to reduce screen reflections and present a more 'neutral black', it claims a modest brightness boost (10 per cent, to a claimed 1,000-nit peak) by virtue of a tweaked sub-pixel design.

As with Philips' previous generation, this TV carries the brand's P5 processing engine, so named because it tackles five key areas of image quality: sharpness, colour, contrast, motion and fine-tuning the incoming source. But in the 803 this 26-step process has been heavily revised, with improvements across noise reduction, motion handling, localised contrast and more. It also introduces a new toy called Perfect Natural Reality. More on that later.

Thin is in

The OLED 803 is elegant almost to the point of obscurity. Viewed front on, there is practically nothing to see but the image itself, with just a hint of thin silver frame around it.

The TV stands on two feet that screw into its base. These are also super-slim but make for a solid footing. An issue, however, might be that they leave little gap between TV and AV furniture; it's not necessarily an ideal design for soundbar owners.

Head around the back and you'll find side-facing and down-facing connection banks. All four of the TV's HDMI inputs handle 4K HDR signals (the down-facing ones limited to 60fps at 4:2:0) and ARC. When it comes to HDR, HDR10 and HLG are joined by the dynamic metadata HDR10+ iteration, which is something I'll get excited about when Fox or Warner decide to finally launch UHD Blu-rays with HDR10+ grades. There's no Dolby Vision support.

Running along three sides of the 803's rear chassis is a strip of LEDs, which deliver the TV's Ambilight illumination feature. This is a brilliant added bonus (you can turn it off if desired) and Philips offers extensive user choice over how it's employed. You can have this immersive lightshow mirroring video content (via various strengths), taking its

cues from audio, presenting a static colour wash (including warm white and D65 options), or even offering a simulacrum of your favourite flag, from Albania to Wales. I'm a fan.

Also visible on the TV's rear is a new 3in triple-ring bass driver, flanked by twin passive units. These are joined by (also new) downfiring mid- and high-frequency drivers. I'd rate the resulting sound performance as good, but not great. There's a nicely robust low-frequency oomph that adds theatrical scale to its soundstage, and body to Vin Diesel's gruff dialogue in *Fast and Furious 7* (UHD Blu-ray). But there's still a sense that the TV is lacking the projection of front-facing drivers – head to Expert Mode and activate DTS TruSurround for a somewhat more immersive presentation.

Philips' regular zapper (with rear QWERTY keyboard) is a bit of a faff to use in the dark as it's not backlit and the legends are tiny. The set also comes with a slim lightweight clicker (it looks a bit like a cigar case) with integrated mic.

Smart features are delivered at present by Android OS 7.0. This means you get the usual curated interface with prominent YouTube videos that you don't want to watch, plus VOD apps including Netflix, YouTube, Amazon Video, Rakuten and BBC iPlayer. You can find more in Philips' own app gallery (including some perhaps unexpected adult content portals), but there's no provision of ITV Hub, All4 or My 5.

It's a knockout

The 803 delivers another knockout Philips OLED image, but with the typical caveat that its picture tweaks are numerous, powerful and sometimes best ignored. There's plenty to explore (gamers should note the Clear Residual Image tool, offered to eradicate OLED screen burn).

For 4K BD viewing I settled on the TV's HDR Movie preset because I'm a Luddite. This, as expected, offers the least visually pimped image. Sharpness is set to zero and Ultra Resolution switched off. Compared to other modes (HDR Vivid, HDR Natural), it can make things feel comparatively soft, but it removes the chance of edge- >

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 55in 4K OLED TV with Android and Ambilight

POSITION: Currently Philips' best-specified OLED

PEERS: LG OLED55B8; Sony KD-55AF8

1. The 803 shows off a thin design and pair of sleek feet

2. The slim remote has integrated mic; the regular zapper has a rear QWERTY keypad





3

enhanced artefacts ruining the clarity of a 4K image, or creating a level of unwanted artifice.

And, while feeling slightly subdued, HDR Movie still delivers the cinematic goods. Chapter 3 of *Fast and Furious 7*, where Shaw breaks into Hobbs' office, shows the excellent contrast handling and true black delivery of the 803. The room's strip-lighting creates shadowed areas and bright highlights that the Philips displays with a beautiful, natural balance. The Rock's stubble and facial pores are crisply detailed even without sharpness boosting tools in play, and the OLED panel has enough native brightness to make HDR objects punchy without feeling like it's coming up short. It also helps that such objects get pixel-level control. The shot where Shaw sits at Hobbs' desk in almost complete darkness, with just a single light illuminating part of his face, is a case in point. OLED's self-emissive tech has no trouble keeping one side of the screen in rich blackness while carefully lighting the other. And in the preceding scene, as Hobbs gives Elena her recommendation letter, there's a wonderful concoction of detail, film grain and natural-looking dark colours and highlights. It's quite gorgeous.

For a more colourful experience, I spun up *Smurfs: The Lost Village* (UHD Blu-ray). This was portrayed as a riot of gorgeous tones – the blues of the eponymous heroes and the lush greens and yellows amidst the flora of the Smurfs village – with refined, subtle blends. Add in the fine detail in Smurfette's hair, and it almost looked good enough for me to want to watch the whole movie. Almost.

Again, this was from the HDR Movie preset (with some adjustments, such as turning off the TV's light sensor). This isn't to say HDR Natural and HDR Vivid should be totally ignored. Both give colour and contrast a push that some will find agreeable. However, as both also give obvious boosts to sharpness and motion fluidity, I'd definitely want to give them a tweak.

In fact, my preference regarding the 803's motion compensation suite is to leave it off, or opt for the Movie option, which avoids overt iciness. Sports, Standard and Smooth are all quite sickly, and prone to occasional interpolation artefacts – although these are no way near as obvious as on TVs of yore.

Feed the Philips an SDR source and you can savour Perfect Natural Reality. This new addition to the P5 engine

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HDR10+; HLG **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD; satellite **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 2 x USB ports; RF input; AV input; Ethernet; digital optical audio output; headphone **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 2 x 10W + 30W (4.1) **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 1,000 nits **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,228(w) x 706(h) x 110(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** N/A

FEATURES: Three-sided Ambilight; P5 Second Generation processor; Perfect Natural Reality; Android OS 7.0; VOD apps including Netflix (4K HDR), Amazon (4K HDR), YouTube (4K) and BBC iPlayer; HDCP 2.2/ARC on all HDMI; Bluetooth; Wi-Fi; DLNA; integrated mic on second remote; 2018 OLED panel with 'Neutral Black' filter

PARTNER WITH



CANTON DM75: Plant the 55OLED803 atop this largescale, high-performance soundbase (now available for around £300) for a sonic boost. It's detailed, powerful and exciting with movies and TV. No HDMI inputs, though.

tackles source, contrast, sharpness and colour (but not motion) to present SDR as HDR. In demonstrations earlier this year hosted by Danny Tack, Philips' director of product strategy, this proved to be masterful at conjuring up an HDR experience, but content favoured a slow (or almost still) approach. So how does it fare with a Blu-ray movie?

In truth, it was subtler than I expected, even when activating the strongest of its three modes. It gave the 1985 thriller *To Live and Die in L.A.* a punchier, more contrasted presentation, lowering the overall brightness level to give more breathing room to highlights. As Willem Dafoe meets his girlfriend in the nightclub dressing room, activating PNR doesn't have a jaw-dropping effect, but does make the dressing table lights glow fiercer and adds a moodier overall tone to proceedings. It reminded me a little of Darbee Visual Presence, actually. I'd be more inclined to use it with sports broadcasts and general TV than my favourite, classic movies.

Note that with an SDR/REC.709 Blu-ray you might want to switch the 803's Colour Gamut option to Wide rather than the Normal default. Although with William Friedkin's *To Live and Die in L.A.* the colour palette is garish enough without this expansion.

OLED thrill ride

Movie-watching on the 803 provides no shortage of thrills. Its master-of-black OLED panel is also bright enough to give a dramatic HDR presentation, and this canvas is joined by authentic colour and detail delivery. It looks great with native 4K sources, and handles HD movies with care if you spend time with its settings – settings that offer significant levels of tweaking and manipulation for those inclined.

The latter makes the 803 not exactly user-friendly, and the low design and absence of the full catch-up TV quota might baffle some, but otherwise this TV is hard to fault ■

HCC VERDICT



Philips 55OLED803

→ £2,000 → www.philips.co.uk

WE SAY: The 55OLED803 makes improvements over its predecessor, delivering cinematic visuals, Ambilight immersion and solid sonics. Great price tag too.



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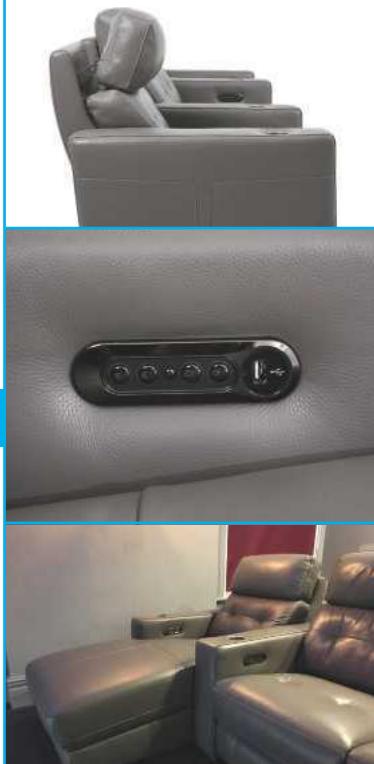
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AV INFO

PRODUCT:
High-end in-wall/on-wall 5.1 speaker package

POSITION:
In-wall iteration of the S150 speakers, below the IW300 and S300

PEERS:
Artcoustic Spitfire 8-4;
ATC HTS40

Steve Withers spends quality time with some high-performance cinema speakers

Get in with the in-wall crowd

If you browse your dictionary for the word iconic, you'll probably see a picture of the M&K Sound S150 next to the definition. The company has had its up and downs – co-founder Ken Kreisel has departed – but the S150 has been a professional studio monitor of choice for decades.

Since its introduction in 1995, the speaker has been installed in film and music recording studios the world over, and it may well have been involved in the mixing of some of your favourite movies and songs. M&K Sound has recently released the larger S300, essentially moving the S150 down to a mid-range position; but that doesn't detract from what remains a world-class speaker.

So if the S150 has been around for so long, what's new from the company? A new approach to installation.

Now you see me...

The original speaker uses a traditional box cabinet, which is designed to be positioned on stands or a convenient shelf. The IW150, as indicated by the prefix, is an in-wall version of the S150.

The appeal of in-wall speakers is undeniable; as soon as you can't see the source of the sound it becomes easier for the listener to be immersed in the experience. This is especially true when it comes to movies, where the whole idea is to create the sensation of actually being in the film's environment. And for some rooms/people, going in-wall is the only acceptable aesthetic option.

The problem with in-wall speakers is that, as the name suggests, you have to physically put them in the wall, which requires a custom installer, a gifted amateur, or the help of a friendly builder. The other problem is that by removing the speaker from its cabinet and sticking it in a wall, you might change its sonic integrity.

In the interests of full disclosure, I didn't start attacking the walls of my home cinema with a sledgehammer in order to audition M&K Sound's IW150s. Thankfully I didn't need to because the speaker uses a sealed enclosure. While it didn't look pretty, I was able to place the speakers right up against the wall on speaker stands. This will have had some effect on their overall signature, as the drivers are no longer interacting with an 'infinite baffle', but shouldn't have adversely impacted the performance.

The 5.1 package reviewed here is composed of three IW150s for front left, right and centre (£1,200 each), a pair of S150T tripole for the surrounds (£1,750), and the X12 subwoofer (£3,200). It's probably worth pointing out that neither the S150Ts nor the X12 are either in-wall or new, but M&K Sound deems them the perfect partners for its latest invention.

Of course, if you had enough space, you could use the IW150 for every channel. But the S150T's proprietary tripole configuration is specifically designed for smaller rooms, where surround speakers are often much closer to the listener. The S150T is THX Ultra-certified, has a lovely cabinet with a black satin finish, and a bracket for wall-mounting.

Further down the brand's in-wall range you'll find the IW950 (twin tweeter, single midbass); and more compact two-way IW95, IW85 and IW5 models.

The also-THX-certified X12 is a beast of a subwoofer, and uses a pair of long-stroke 12in woofers (in a push-pull configuration) in a sealed black-satin enclosure. M&K Sound knows a thing or two about building subs, and the driver array is designed to deliver a total surface area equivalent to a single 18in unit. In other words it should be more than capable of enhancing the bass performance of the relatively small passive speakers. For those seeking an all in-wall system, M&K Sound sells the passive 2 x 8in IW28S subwoofer.

Three plus two = one serious speaker

From the front, the IW150 looks exactly like the S150: it has the classic M&K Sound driver layout of three vertically aligned 1in soft fabric dome tweeters down its left-hand side, and a pair of 5.25in polypropylene woofers ranged down the right. The speakers come with white magnetic grilles that can be painted whatever colour the wall is, blending them in with the overall decor.

M&K Sound's aim here is to reduce the internal volume to 20 to 30 per cent of a normal S150 cabinet, while





preserving the neutrality, realism and musicality associated with its design. As a result, the company claims a frequency response for the IW150 of 80Hz to 20kHz and a sensitivity of 90dB, which is very close to the S150 despite the lack of a traditional enclosure. The cabinet is sealed to provide effective protection, and there are damping pads on the rear to eliminate vibration when in direct contact with the wall.

All the mounting hardware is pre-fitted to the enclosure, including metal clamps to fix speaker wire in the pre-cut grooves, and gold-plated push-on terminals for easy cable connection. There are torx mounting screws

'A system with detail, clarity and transience to spare – it's a performance you'll instantly fall in love with'

on the front baffle that turn special washers for a smooth installation, along with a practical and efficient self-tightening dog-ear clamp system for a flush seal between baffle and wall.

I set the speakers up as I would any 5.1 system, with the three IW150s at the same level along the front wall, just beneath my projector screen. The S150Ts were at a similar height, but to the side and slightly behind the main listening position; the X12 was at the front, located in a part of the room I knew would deliver a relatively neutral bass response. The speakers were driven by my reference Arcam AVR850 AV receiver.

Utterly transparent

As soon as I started listening to the IW150s, I could tell that M&K Sound had achieved the goal of retaining what makes its speakers so special, while also significantly reducing the size of the enclosure. The front three models perfectly match each other in terms of tonality, but are also utterly transparent when it comes to their delivery.

That's what you'd expect from a speaker with a studio monitor heritage, but the fact the IW150s can do this given their slender dimensions is nothing short of a revelation.

Although they're fairly sensitive speakers, they appreciate being driven with a bit of power, and the AVR850 is more than happy to oblige. Pushed into action, the IW150s are effortlessly capable of a pleasingly open sound that fills the room.

There's a wonderful detail and clarity here, and a sense that you're hearing exactly what the sound designer or mixer wants you to. The high-end is perfectly rendered, while the mid-tones are also well represented, resulting in an excellent performance across the majority of the frequency range.

Despite the difference between them in cabinet design, the IW150s at the front seem a perfect match for the S150Ts at the rear. As a result, the overall system delivers a beautifully cohesive 360-degree soundstage, allowing for precise steering of effects that remain tonally balanced as they move from speaker to speaker.

If I had one criticism of the IW150, it's that it's slightly lacking at the low-end, although to a certain extent that's the point. These are satellite speakers (they just don't look like much of the satellite competition) and are designed to be used in a system that's augmented by a subwoofer.



The bold-looking X12 does this in spades, with a massive bass presence that ably delivers lower frequencies until it crosses over with the IW150s at 80Hz. It's a top-to-bottom performance that sounds seamless in its integration, built upon a sub-sonic floor that's evenly distributed.

Dunkirk (4K Blu-ray) has an exceptional DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack, and I was looking forward to hearing what the M&K Sounds could do with it. This quintet didn't disappoint, delivering the subtly layered mix with an incredible detail that creates a genuine sense of location; be it the sound of surf on the beach, wind blowing across the decks of boats, or the rattle inside a Spitfire cockpit.



4



The system also steps up to the plate when things kick off, absolutely nailing the terrifying high-pitched scream of the Stuka dive-bombers, and the earth-shattering explosions that follow. Hans Zimmer's deliberately sparse score is conveyed with remarkable clarity; the ticking watch motif is evident throughout the soundtrack. The system's superlative mid-range delivery is apparent during the sinking of a troop ship, while the X12 adds a deliciously cinematic low-end presence to the Spitfire's wing-mounted machine guns.

The Blu-ray of *A Quiet Place* (see p92) is my new favourite test disc, with an incredibly complex soundtrack that manages the near-impossible task of creating silence. Despite the protagonists' efforts to remain unheard, the mix itself is filled with subtle audio cues, such as wind rustling through the leaves, and the hums and clicks of insects. These all come through with exceptional realism and precise localisation, immediately immersing you in the world of the film.

It's also a film that makes creative use of dynamic range, because when someone (or something) does make a noise, my God you know about it. The transient response of these speakers is incredible, viscerally delivering the scares as the soundtrack suddenly goes from relative silence to very very loud. The tendency of sound designers

SPECIFICATIONS

M&K Sound IW150

DRIVE UNITS: 3 x 1in soft fabric dome tweeters; 2 x 5.25in polypropylene woofers
ENCLOSURE: Sealed, in-wall **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 80Hz-20kHz
SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED): 90dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 400W
DIMENSIONS: 311(w) x 354(h) x 95(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 8.5kg

M&K Sound S150T

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in soft fabric dome tweeter; 1 x 5.25in fibreglass woofer; 2 x 3.5in paper pulp side-firing drivers **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 80Hz-20kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 86dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 200W
DIMENSIONS: 165(w) x 270(h) x 150(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 4.8kg

M&K Sound X12

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x long-stroke 12in woofers in a push-pull configuration
ENCLOSURE: Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 20Hz-200Hz
ON BOARD POWER (CLAIMED): 400W RMS/700W peak **REMOTE CONTROL:** No
DIMENSIONS: 440(w) x 656(h) x 453(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 36kg
CONNECTIONS: LFE input; stereo line-level phono input/output; stereo line-level XLR input/output; variable phase and low-pass filter; THX EQ; +3dB/+5dB boost

PARTNER WITH



ARCAM AVR850: This receiver uses Class G amplification to drive its seven channels, and Dirac Live room correction to fettle the surround performance. Dolby Atmos and DTS:X decoding are naturally on the feature list. Price is around £4,500.

Erik Aadahl and Ethan Van der Ryn to add plenty of low-frequency heft to these moments for greater impact finds the X12 in fine form – it handled the dynamic beats with ease, establishing a solid foundation and carefully locking in with the other speakers.

Dunkirk and *A Quiet Place* aren't big on dialogue but when I moved on to *Whiplash* (Blu-ray) the abuse that J. K. Simmons hurls at Miles Teller is projected with spiteful precision. The main reason I chose this disc, though, was to ensure the IW150s had retained M&K's musicality as well as its transparency. I quickly had my answer, thanks to a system that's tighter than a syncopated jazz quartet, carrying off every high hat, cymbal and snare drum with excellent timing.

Enhanced reputation

M&K Sound already has a solid reputation with home cinema fans, and the company's new in-wall range makes for an interesting development. Its ambition has been vindicated with an exceptional speaker that achieves the goal of delivering the brand's signature sound from an incredibly discreet enclosure.

Here they've been blended with other models culled from the M&K Sound range to produce a 5.1 system with detail, clarity and transience to spare. It's the kind of performance you'll instantly fall in love with – grab yourself an audition ■

HCC VERDICT



M&K Sound IW150 5.1

→ £8,550 → www.mkloudspeakers.uk

WE SAY: All the transparency and detail of a professional studio monitor, in an enclosure that can simply vanish. If you're looking for in-wall speakers, look here.

2. A tripole design, the S150T ensures a wide surround dispersion

3. The IW150s feature a trio of tweeters and twin midbass drivers

4. M&K Sound's X12 offers balanced and unbalanced inputs

AV INFO**PRODUCT:**
Affordable 55in 4K HDR LED TV**POSITION:**
Below TCL's QLED X6 range, above the C7 models**PEERS:**
Samsung 55NU7100;
Sony KD-55XF7596;
Hisense 55U7A

Can TCL beat its big-brand rivals with this affordable 55-incher? **Mark Craven** reports

New kid on the 4K block

TCL, the Chinese panel maker/TV manufacturer (and owner of the BlackBerry phone brand), continues to dip its toes into the UK telly market in the shape of the 55DC748, a 55in edge-lit LED model that claims to bring a high-end level of performance (aided by an integrated JBL soundbar) to the mid-range market. So is this a 4K HDR flatscreen that bargain-hunters should have an eye on?

Well, possibly. The 55DC748 has some obvious strengths – not least its £800 asking price – but isn't without picture performance niggles, too. Perhaps the most striking is an absence of any motion compensation/smoothing, which is almost expected on a mid-range set. Dig around the menus and you'll find no tool available to combat judder or a loss of detail with fast-motion. Handily, the TCL's native motion performance isn't disastrous, but for sports watching in particular many will feel they are missing out.

The edge of darkness

Anyway, on to what the 55DC748 does offer. In addition to its edge LED illumination, it features a 10-bit VA-type panel, and claims a wide colour delivery (94 per cent of the DCI-P3 colour space) and 500-nit brightness. It's HDR10 and HLG HDR compatible (but not Dolby Vision or HDR10+), and packs calibration options including colour management, gamma and white balance.

Aesthetically, the TV is dominated by the cylindrical soundbar (designed by audio marque JBL) that runs across its bottom edge. The rest of the set is more nondescript. It's mainly nicely slim but with a widening rear end that feels rather plasticky. Getting it onto its large, angled silver feet is a chore, and I've felt TVs that are somewhat sturdier when assembled.

There are three (not four) HDMI inputs, plus USB 2.0 and 3.0 ports. These are all side-mounted, making a flat-to-wall installation possible. For network functions, the TV offers Wi-Fi and Ethernet, plus Bluetooth transmission to compatible headphones.

As my review sample was supplied by TCL's European office, it ran the Android 7.0 UI. However, TCL says the 55DC748 will actually feature a Linux-based smart system in the UK, enabling it to feature Freeview Play integration for UK catch-up apps – something not feasible with Android TVs at present. For this review I therefore can't comment on the set's smart features, and it's easy to think UK buyers are getting a bit of a rough deal.

Still, the TV is easy to use, with the slender main remote well-designed and TCL's menus responsive and easy to get your head around. The first thing you'll want to do with the 55DC748 after wiring up your sources is to head into these menus and switch off the Button Sound feature – otherwise the TV will beep at you every time you click on your zapper, and quickly drive you mad.

No sunglasses needed

A lack of sizzling brightness means the set's performance with 4K HDR Blu-rays always feels a little under-powered in comparison to pricier rivals, but TCL's efficient tone-mapping means this shortfall in luminance doesn't readily equate to distracting clipping/blow outs. And, considering the price tag, its ability to deliver the more lifelike dynamic range of next-gen sources is actually rather good.

The planetary fly-past in *Interstellar* (UHD Blu-ray, Chapter 8) sees the lone ship Endurance glide across the screen as a bright, distant dot. Not quite amidst a sea of black, though, as the 55DC748's edge LED system can make its presence felt on dark sequences. There's no local dimming here; whole-frame dimming is instead employed to adjust the picture to suit >







3

onscreen content. The result can be a grey misting over image areas that really should be a velvety black, but is much better than the obvious bars/pools of light that can beset local dimming LED implementations.

This misting effect becomes far less apparent when the TV is viewed in a room with ambient light. And, in such circumstances, choosing the HDR Natural mode over the go-to HDR Movie will give the TCL more of a chance of retaining its impact. (Dynamic actually has a darker overall feel than Natural. Go figure).

Back to *Interstellar*. As Anne Hathaway and Matthew McConaughey circle the wormhole in Endurance, the interiors of the ship, and details such as reflections on their space-suits, are well-defined. There's plenty of UHD clarity, and those seeking a boost can always adjust sharpness, being wary of ringing artefacts, of course.

'With *Blade Runner* 4K, this TV delivers a picture that begs you to sit back in your cinema chair and lap it up'

Viewing *Blue Planet II* (UHD Blu-ray) finds the TV's wide colour delivery making an impact, although the aforementioned brightness limitation means there's a lack of sheer colour volume. The prominent blues, greens and turquoises in Episode 5 (*Coasts*) are varied, but missing real punch. The image remains natural-looking though; there's plenty to soak in as the camera pans over rocky cliffs, or sea lions frolic in sun-dappled waters.

SDR content opens up menu options with HDR, including dynamic contrast. And, as with its 4K HDR performance, the TCL does most things well. For instance, as Will Smith chases the alien in *Men in Black* (Blu-ray, Chapter 2), there's a healthy contrast range, strong colour performance and an impressive ability to retain shadow detail. The picture has a sense of depth, and the TCL efficiently remaps the 1080p source to its 4K panel.

The same sequence viewed via the HDR Blu-ray has subtle, beneficial boosts to picture areas such as car headlights and Will Smith's blinging jewellery, and a richer colour performance, particularly noticeable in the yellow newspaper truck and Smith's orange tracksuit.

And it's with 4K HDR that this TV looks its best. Sony Pictures' triumphant 4K platter for Ridley Scott's

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD; satellite **CONNECTIONS:** 3 x HDMI inputs; 2 x USB ports; AV input; Ethernet; digital optical audio output; headphone **SOUND (CLAIMED):** N/A (stereo integrated soundbar) **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 500 nits **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (ON STAND):** 1,233(w) x 790(h) x 240(d)mm **WEIGHT (ON STAND):** 18kg

FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi; built in Bluetooth; USB/DLNA media playback; Linux-based smart system (unavailable on review sample); whole-frame edge LED dimming; VA-type panel; wide colour; Dynamic Contrast; Dynamic Background; colour management, white balance and gamma adjustments

PARTNER WITH



AMAZON FIRE 4K: For £70 you can add Amazon's content-rich and 4K HDR compatible streaming platform to the TCL TV via this compact HDMI dongle. The user interface isn't the slickest around, but the value on offer here is hard to argue with.

Blade Runner delivers a picture that begs you to sit back in your cinema chair and lap it up. The opening pan over the future Los Angeles has balls of flame erupting powerfully into the night sky, and the neon-drenched cityscapes are at times beautiful. When Deckard pops out for some noodles, the luminous umbrella handles of the cityfolk appear electrically charged against a backdrop that oozes pixel refinement.

Adequate audio

So where does the 55DC748 fall flat? Firstly, its audio. Despite that prominent two-way stereo soundbar, the TCL's sound performance is merely adequate. Everything sounds a bit muffled and smallscale, meaning action movie moments don't have the dynamic hit and high-frequency clarity of a decent soundbar. The menu offers virtual surround and bass tweaks, plus presets. You're advised to have a fiddle, and partner with an external sound system if possible.

I also experienced a lip-sync issue when the TV was connected directly to an Oppo UDP-203 Blu-ray player, something I've not come across before. It was solved not through the deck's AV Sync menu, but switching to LPCM rather than bitstream output, suggesting the issue lay with the TV's own decoding.

At times I spotted localised areas of noise over dark image parts, and found the effects of TCL's contrast enhancements – Mixed Dimming, Micro Dimming, Dynamic Contrast – to be minimal. Most obviously, though, it's the 55DC748's occasionally visible backlight, less-than-class leading luminance, and missing frame interpolation that limits this set's appeal. That said, what we have here is an impressive mid-range TV, and one that gives a better performance than you might expect. It's solid and steady, rather than spectacular ■

HCC VERDICT



TCL 55DC748

→ £800 → www.tcl.eu/en

WE SAY: There's a healthy stability to this TV's 4K HDR images, and the price is good. Still some niggles, though, and the decision to eschew Android functionality in the UK is odd.

The Worlds Finest Filmmakers use M&K to Make their Movies Does Your Cinema Deserve Anything Less?



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Polk 'bar takes movies to the MAX

Mark Craven auditions a soundbar with surround ambitions and an ear for dialogue



Polk Audio is the latest brand to add wireless rear speakers to a soundbar/subwoofer system, therefore offering a 5.1 solution to those not interested in the more traditional approach based around a separate amplifier, 5.1 speaker package and oodles of speaker cable.

The system in question is the Magnifi MAX SR, available for around £600. It's the expanded version of Polk's 3.1-channel Magnifi MAX, itself a more serious proposition than the compact Magnifi Mini.

Polk Audio, now a sister brand of Denon via its umbrella corp Sound United, is well known in its native US for its floorstanding and standmount hi-fi/home cinema speakers, but its main push on these shores seems to be its soundbars. Also recently announced is the Command Bar, which integrates Amazon Alexa AI functionality. While this feature is absent on the Magnifi MAX SR, it is Google Assistant compatible – set it up through the Google Home app and you can pair it with other Google speakers for multiroom audio.

Scary sub

The main soundbar is sized to be a natural fit to large (but not monstrous) flatscreen TVs and has a neat, curvy design. This round-edged aesthetic is mirrored by

the two surround speakers and down-firing subwoofer. All are dressed in black (with some chrome details) and do their best to not dominate a room, although the woofer looks a little like an egg from *Alien*.

As befits a modern soundbar, the Magnifi MAX offers 3-in, 1-out 4K HDR-capable HDMI switching, plus Bluetooth for device streaming and Wi-Fi for Google

Chromecast/Assistant integration. More prosaic connections are a digital optical audio input, 3.5mm audio input, and Ethernet. A USB port, located on the same rear panel on the soundbar, is for service use only.

For its drivers, the Magnifi uses four 1in x 3in oval midbass units, plus dual tweeters and a single mid-range, with a claimed 180W of power spread across them. The subwoofer is rated at 160W, and packs an 8in woofer. Polk says the system's frequency response goes down to 35Hz.

The surround speakers require a mains connection; unlike the units on JBL's Bar 5.1 [HCC #284] they don't use rechargeable onboard batteries. Both sync wirelessly with the soundbar though (as does the subwoofer), making for a neat final installation provided you have handily placed wall sockets.

There's no automated calibration here, but Polk has endowed the system with a reasonable amount of user control. The supplied remote offers tweaks for surround >

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
5.1-channel soundbar system

POSITION:
Polk Audio's premium soundbar package

PEERS:
JBL Bar 5.1;
Philips Fidelio B5;
Samsung HW-MS650



1. The SR iteration brings wireless rears to the soundbar party

2. Sensible button placement, although the surround keys are a bit fiddly





3

channel volume and L/R balance, plus Bass and Voice adjustments in addition to master volume. The latter is a Polk speciality, designed to tackle poorly presented dialogue in TV/movies.

Monkey business

I'm yet to shake my addiction to *Kong: Skull Island*'s riotous Blu-ray soundmix – the disc never seems to make it back into its case – so I put the Magnifi MAX SR to the test with the movie's Kong vs Helicopters sequence. And as a 5.1 system (you wouldn't buy this package to use without the surround speakers) it succeeds in enveloping you in the aural carnage; when Kong sends the chopper into a downward spiral, the swirling sound design whips around the listening position, with effective pans across the rear L/R channels.

The mains-connected design for the surrounds brings good and bad points. Compared to battery powered models, it's refreshing to not have to worry about charging them, and their onboard amp implementation ensures they're not short of grunt. But being tethered to walls affects their placement flexibility, which in turn affects the uniformity of the 5.1 soundfield you can create. To get them in an optimal position, I resorted to a mains extension lead (suddenly that wireless home cinema dream gets further way) and then used the remote's balance/volume levels to dial them in as best I could.

The system does detail and articulation well. During the *Skull Island* set-piece, there's a moment's respite as a scientist bites down on his sandwich. This visual gag is delivered with clean, delicate and believable sounds. Effects, even amidst the chaos of Kong's attack, are defined and well-separated, and earlier in the film, when Samuel L Jackson's colonel takes a call in a phone booth as the rain teems down, the buzz of the army barracks in the surround channels blends in nicely.

Polk Audio's Voice Adjust tool works considerable magic, effectively raising dialogue levels without making a mess of the soundscape – it helps that its impact can be tweaked incrementally, which is far preferable to a basic on/off choice. You can even lower it from its default setting, which seems a bit weird.

How much benefit it brings is content dependent, though. With *Skull Island*, I have no complaints about dialogue prioritisation, so while it succeeded here in making chatter more pronounced, is it necessary? I found it far more useful with TV. By knocking the system's overall

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 0.75in tweeters; 1 x 1in midrange; 4 x 1in x 3in midbass
ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED): 180W **CONNECTIONS:** 3 x HDMI inputs; HDMI output (ARC); Ethernet; optical digital audio input; 3.5mm input **DOLBY TRUEHD/**
DTS-HD MA: No/No. Core DD/DTS **SEPARATE SUBWOOFER:** Yes. 8in woofer; 160W amplifier **REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes **DIMENSIONS (SOUNDBAR):** 1,092(w) x 53(h) x 96(d)mm **WEIGHT (SOUNDBAR):** 2.74kg

FEATURES: Bluetooth; Wi-Fi; Chromecast Built-in; Polk Voice Adjust technology; Polk SDA Surround Technology; Night Mode; wireless (mains-powered) surround speakers; wireless subwoofer connection; HDCP 2.2 on HDMI

PARTNER WITH



PHILIPS 55PUS6753: Keep overall system costs down with this £700 55in 4K TV from Philips. Direct LED lighting ensures a stable contrast delivery with HDR content, making up for a lack of real brightness. Packs Ambilight and Freeview Play.

volume level down but setting Voice to its maximum, I was able to easily make out Chris Packham's narration on natural history doc *Nature's Weirdest Events* while minimising the inane background music. Handy.

Wonder Woman (Blu-ray) has a soundmix the Magnifi MAX SR can sink its teeth into. The climactic scenes at the German airbase present various challenges – an immersive surround ambience, crackling, largescale FX as Ares wreaks havoc, shouted/muffled dialogue, and the orchestral swells of the film's superb score – and, overall, its presentation is rewarding. The 8in subwoofer laps up the ominous LFE throbs, and the whole soundstage seems to grow in size as music is used to ram home the sacrifice that Steve Trevor (Chris Pine) is about to make.

That said, the system can be tripped up by differences in low-frequency material. There were moments when I found the sub boomy and unsubtle (but, to be fair, other instances where it seemed well integrated), and lacking in the outright slam (rather than depth) the onscreen visuals deserved. This lack of attack is replicated at the other end of the frequency range, leading to a sound that errs on the side of caution rather than dynamics.

The 'bar defaults to Music mode with Bluetooth, Chromecast or 3.5mm sources. In addition to whatever DSP this imparts, it lets you cycle between soundbar/sub delivery and all-channel playback. The latter is fun for uncritical listening; the pseudo surround generated if you choose Movie mode out of curiosity isn't.

Fighting back

Straight-up soundbars have been robbing film soundtracks of their multichannel brilliance for over a decade now, so I'm all in favour of products that fight back against the stereo hordes. The Magnifi MAX SR has a few niggles, but otherwise holds up well ■

HCC VERDICT



Polk Audio Magnifi MAX SR

→ £600 → en.polkaudio.com

WE SAY: Bass handling and dynamics could be improved but this is still a pleasing concoction of multichannel sonics, superb connectivity and tidy design. Voice Adjust is useful, too.

3. The surround units can attach to supplied wall-mount brackets

PHILIPS

Television

OLED 803

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New Philips OLED 803. Coming soon.

*Philips OLED TV.
Looks better.*



www.philips.com/tv

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
55in Ultra HD/HDR
OLED TV

POSITION:
The FZ952 is
Panasonic's premium
2018 option

PEERS:
Sony KD-55AF8;
Samsung 55Q9FN

Breathtaking image quality is only part of the FZ952's appeal, gushes a star-struck **Steve May**

OLED's looking legendary

Panasonic's ownership of Universal Studios in the 1990s may have been short-lived, but it's had a lasting impact on the way the brand makes TVs. That strategic purchase of the movie studio led to the creation of its Hollywood Labs R&D operation, and deep ties with creatives, in particular colourists, who have helped fine-tune its displays on a mission to replicate the images seen in professional mastering suites.

But in a year when LG, with its 8 Series models, and Sony with the AF8, are making sizeable OLED waves of their own (and Philips has joined the fray with its 803 TV – see p42), can this well-connected HDR hot-shot claim top-billing amongst the OLED elite?

The FZ952 premieres in two guises, the 55in model reviewed here, and a step-up 65-inch. Don't be too surprised, though, if a 77in stablemate makes a cameo soon. And if you see references to an FZ950 model elsewhere, it's the same set *sans* a Freeview Play tuner.

Design-wise, the TV is understated. Panasonic has adopted a clean, unfussy look. The screen trim is slight, while the pedestal, with bolt-on soundbar, supports it like an end-of-pier magician.

Cosmetically this Dynamic Blade Speaker (to give it its full moniker) is a perfect match. It attaches directly to the central pedestal, audio routed via a bespoke lead. And the speaker has considerably more clout than the first Blade; Panasonic says it has boosted onboard power by as much as 40 per cent.

Note that if you want to wall-mount the TV, an alternative bracket is provided in the box, which orients the soundbar downward.

Connections include four HDMI inputs, all HDCP 2.2-enabled. However, as has seemingly become commonplace, only two (inputs 1 and 2) are full bandwidth. They're joined by three USB ports (one a fast v3.0), an SD card reader, component and phono stereo audio inputs, and a digital optical audio output for external sound system use. There's also Ethernet as well as on-board Wi-Fi.

When it comes to tuners, there's a choice of Freeview HD or Freesat HD. The Freeview programme guide features a PIP window with audio, and offers seven-day roll-back functionality.

In line with previous Panasonic range-toppers, the FZ952 comes with two remote controls – a nicely finished IR doofer and a Bluetooth touchpad model.

Jaw-dropper

The FZ952 doesn't take long to elicit a huge grin. Panasonic has taken a different approach to its rivals when it comes to colour processing and HDR, and the result is mesmerising. The set looks jaw-dropping right from the box – but don't get distracted.

Available image modes are Normal, Dynamic, Cinema, THX Cinema, THX Bright Room, True Cinema, Sport, Custom, plus Professional 1/2 (ISF), which is possibly a bigger choice than most will want. The Normal preset is the best option for watching in rooms with typical levels of ambient light. The Dynamic mode over-saturates, but not always in a bad way – animation in particular can look really engaging via this enhancement.

However, with non-HDR content (and that's going to be the bulk of what you watch, unless you're already a card-carrying 4K snob), the THX Cinema and True Cinema modes suffer from a significantly reduced level of luminance (down to as little as 30 per cent). They shouldn't be viewed in anything other than full dark-room viewing conditions. To be honest, I probably wouldn't use them at all. Owning a panel like this and watching HD SDR on the THX setting is akin to buying a Ferrari in order to drive under the speed limit.

The smart money says stick with Normal, but for additional pizzazz, set peak luminance to maximum. And when displaying 4K HDR content, this is exactly what you get – all the FZ952's image presets deliver full-panel luminance and contrast with HDR, and the differences between the various presets are less pronounced. Here the FZ952's True Cinema mode replicates the same UHD >

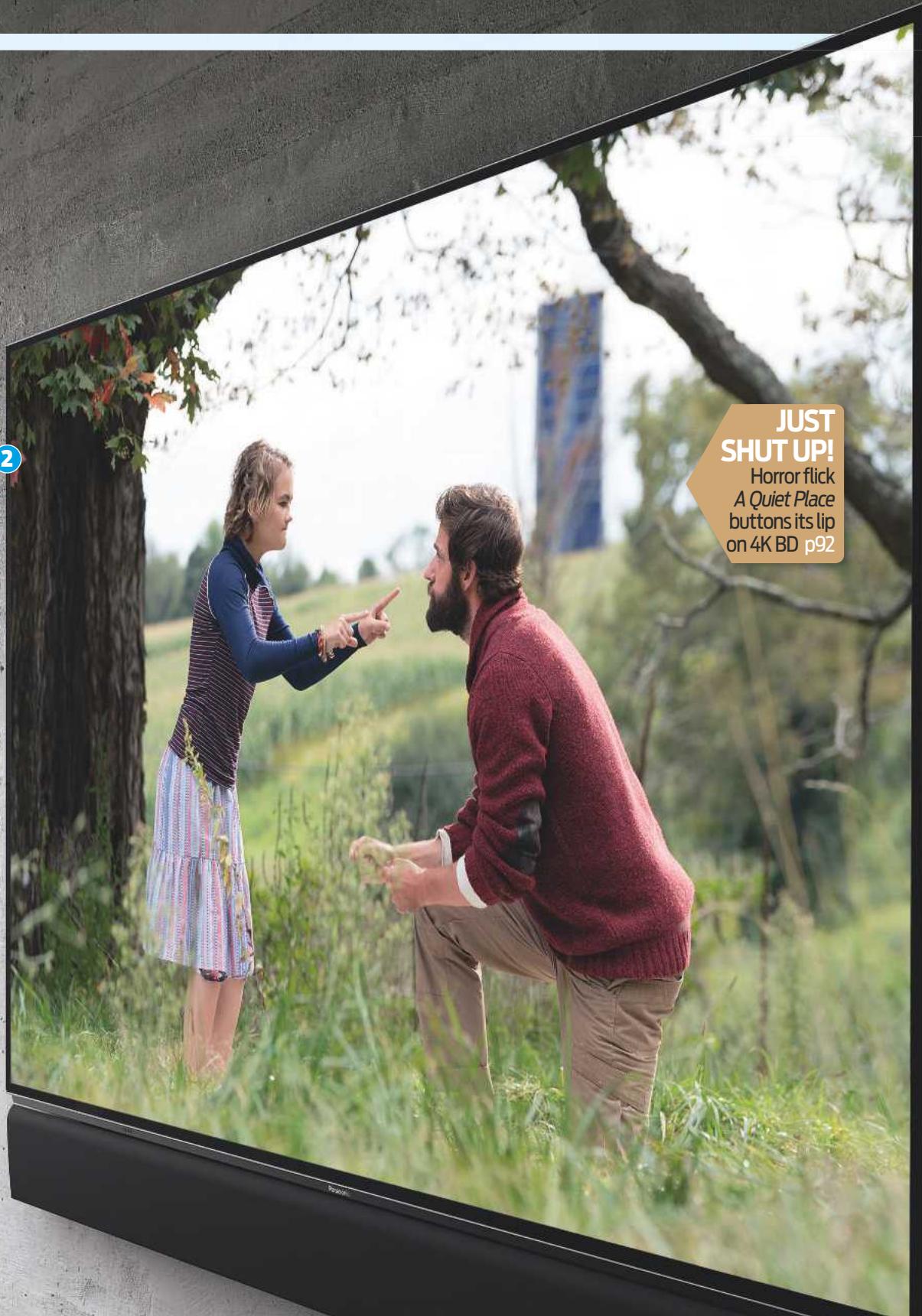
1. Panasonic's standard IR remote flaunts a silver finish

2. When wall-mounted, the Dynamic Blade Speaker lies flat



1

2



**JUST
SHUT UP!**
Horror flick
A Quiet Place
buttons its lip
on 4K BD p92



image characteristics of a Hollywood mastering monitor, but still requires a dark theatre to really impress.

Helpfully, you don't have to delve into the menus to swap between picture modes. The Picture button on the remote can be customised, using a check box list of all the available presets to give swift access to preferred settings.

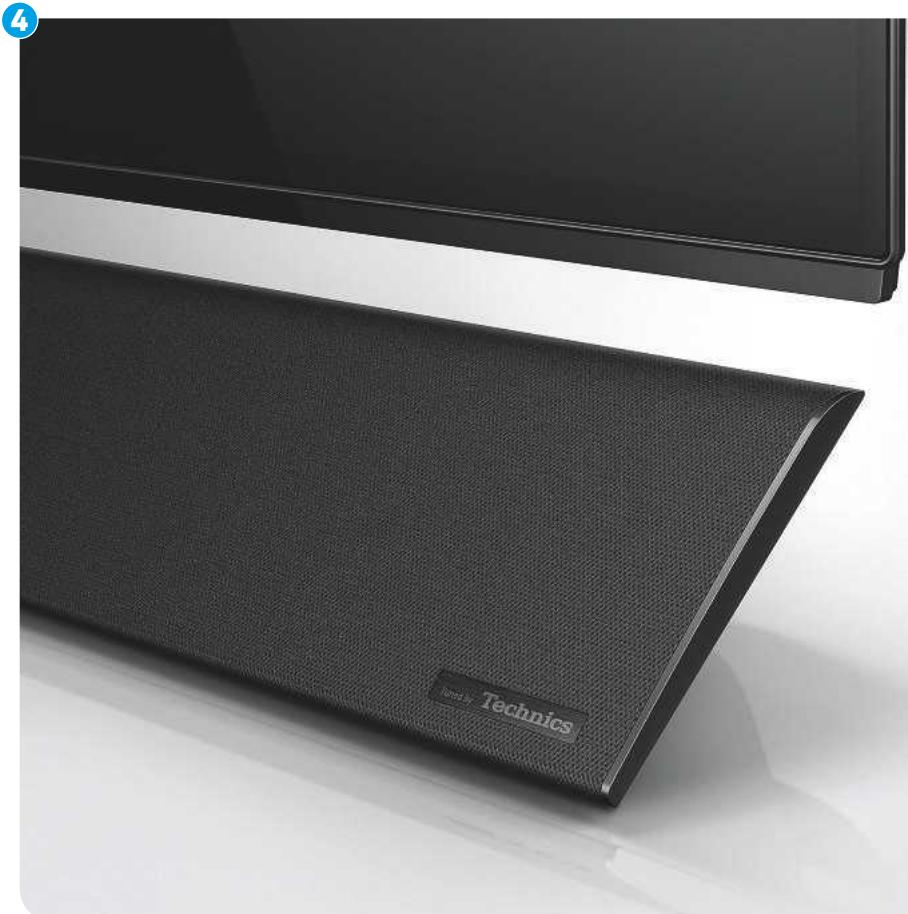
Colour artistry

Perhaps the most obvious trait of the FZ952 is its lustrous colour presentation. From regular Blu-ray and Sky Q HD, to OTT streams, there's a vivacity here which would delight even van Gogh. At the heart of the set is a second-generation Panasonic HCX Studio Colour video processor. The screen also employs Dynamic LUT (Look Up Table) technology, which constantly analyses picture information in order to improve colour accuracy.

HDR support covers HDR10, HLG and HDR10+. The latter is an open dynamic metadata standard that warrants a closer view. Unfortunately, there's not much to see at the moment.

HDR10+ is positioned as an alternative to Dolby Vision. It does much the same thing, analysing content on a scene-by-scene basis to provide the most accurate tone mapping information. There are some secret-sauce differences between it and Dolby Vision, but nothing to get too hung up about. For example, HDR10+ has a roadmap that allows it to move to 12-bit colour encoding, as and when panels become a reality. At the moment 12-bit Dolby Vision downscals to everyday 10-bit.

The real problem is that there's no appreciable HDR10+ content. Amazon ostensibly supports and delivers such



streams, but as they are not overtly flagged there's no immediate way to tell if you're watching HDR10 or its dynamic cousin. HDR10+ discs are still awaited.

The FZ952 doesn't support Dolby Vision. But this does at least allow us to judge the its HDR performance at face value – and in that respect it doesn't disappoint.

The best-performing HDR TV yet from Panasonic, peak luminance was measured at around 750 nits using a 10 per cent HDR window. Reducing this to a smaller 5 per cent

'With this Panasonic TV, HD looks remarkable. Images are pin-sharp, edges smooth and textures almost amplified'

window saw HDR peaks jump to around 900 nits. Given that most specular highlights are extremely small (imagine fireworks, glinting reflections, lighting VFX) this set should easily cope. And with some HDR content, it won't need to tone map at all.

Luke Cage (Netflix) is a beautiful-looking HDR show, with intricate lighting effects and a rich colour palette. The FZ952 does a marvellous job with this, crafting images that are always dramatic and dynamic. Unsurprisingly for OLED, black level performance is solid and inky. But more importantly, the TV's near-black rendering is peerless. Subtle shadow and texture is preserved, adding real depth to the image.

This applies with both HDR and SDR content. In the Season 4 finale of *The Flash* (Sky One HD), a beautifully created sequence set inside the villain's consciousness is virtually monotone but peppered with bright lights and lens flare. The FZ952 has the talent to turn this into a convincing *faux* HDR experience.

And while post-apocalyptic SF adventure *The 100* (E4 HD) can look a bit like a poorly-lit smoosh on LED LCD screens, seen on the FZ952 there's incredible detail retained in the desolate shadows and twilight action sequences. In fact, I don't think I've ever seen this show look better. With this Panasonic TV hi-def looks remarkable. Images are pin-sharp, edges smooth; texture seems almost amplified.

Motion handling is also a cut above what I've come to expect from Panasonic. It's IFC (Intelligent Frame Creation) engine has a reputation for being heavy-handed, but here on its Min setting, the screen presents fast-moving detail without punishing artefacts. A Summer of football and athletics provided my sample with plenty of opportunity to shine, and it kept images wonderfully clear throughout. I wasn't distracted by any horrible MPEG fog around pumping limbs.

For 24fps movies, try the Custom IFC setting, with Blur on 8 and Smooth on 1. Panasonic also offers a Black Frame Insertion mode. This may measure well but is unusable, as it darkens the picture and introduces overt flicker.

Same old smarts

There are no significant changes to Panasonic's Smart OS. Now at v3.0, the My Home Screen platform has seen some

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG; HDR10+ **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD (Freeview Play); Freesat HD **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB; optical digital audio output; Ethernet; component/composite AV; SD card; headphone output **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 80W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 'Ultra Bright Panel' **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** 'Ultimate Contrast' **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,228(w) x 713(h) x 62(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 21kg

FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi; USB multimedia playback; SD card multimedia playback; Technics-tuned Dynamic Blade Speaker; HCX processor; IFC with Black Frame Insertion; ISF calibration; THX certification; My Home Screen OS

PARTNER WITH



PANASONIC DMP-UB820: When HDR10+ platters finally arrive, Panasonic's £400 upper-tier deck will be able to play them – as well as Dolby Vision titles. Connections include dual HDMI outs and a 7.1-channel analogue audio output.



minor tweaks, but remains essentially the same, with its trio of buttons on the home page that can be augmented with additional shortcuts to services.

Thanks to Freeview Play, catch-up TV support is comprehensive, with BBC iPlayer, ITVHub, All4, My 5, BBC News, BBC Sport and UKTV Play all available. Other apps include Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, YouTube and Rakuten TV.

The FZ952 isn't just for binge-watching. It's also a cracking display for gamers. Play in Normal mode, and image lag is poor at 106ms. However, activate the Game mode (where IFC is completely disabled) and response time improves to a frag-friendly 21ms.

Audio quality, thanks to that integrated Dynamic Blade Speaker, is first-class. The Technics-tuned soundbar uses four woofers, four mid-range drivers and two tweeters (plus passive radiators). The resulting presentation is clean and well-defined, with a revealing mid-range and decent low-frequency extension. The only sonic downside to the FZ952 is that it's not Dolby Atmos compatible. AV enthusiasts would doubtless value a screen able to route out a Dolby Atmos bitstream from either its onboard VOD apps or from a connected set-top box.

Outstanding OLED

The TX-55FZ952B is massively impressive. In terms of picture prowess, it's probably the best OLED I've seen to date, thanks to a combination of supreme sharpness and contrast, and outstanding colour performance. Its HDR chops are considerable, too. This is Panasonic's finest 4K display, and certain to be a contender when we get to end-of-year celebrations ■

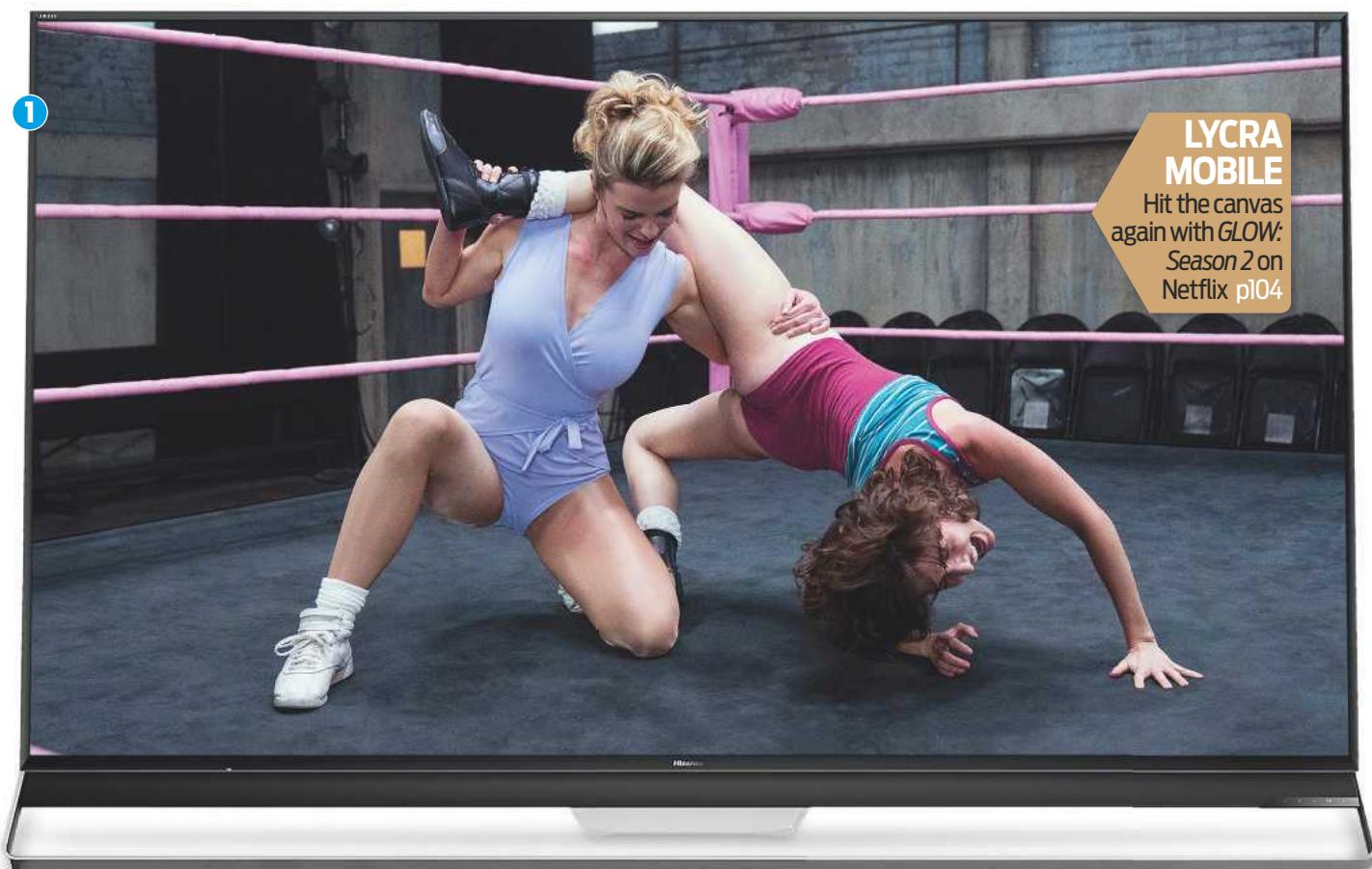
HCC VERDICT



Panasonic TX-55FZ952B

→ £2,500 → www.panasonic.co.uk

WE SAY: With its superb colour fidelity and refined HDR, this Panasonic is an AV-Holic's dream. Add a Technics soundbar and advanced Smart OS, and you get something special.



Let there be light!

Hisense is out to prove that it's much more than just a 'budget brand' with this super-bright 75in LED TV flagship. **John Archer** prepares to be dazzled

THANKS TO A combination of high-profile sponsorship deals and a procession of strikingly affordable TVs, Chinese brand Hisense has already made its mark on the mainstream UK TV scene. Now, with the H75U9A, it's mounting a serious assault on the higher end of the market too. A 75in, £3,500 LCD model, it may well catch the eye of those looking at smaller OLED screens around the same price point.

Its wall-filling size isn't its only attraction. In fact, the H75U9A boasts not one but two groundbreaking features.

First, its direct LED lighting engine is driven by 1,056 individually controlled dimming zones. To put this in perspective, even Samsung's mighty QE65Q9FN TV [see *HCC* #285] offers around 450 zones.

This flatscreen's other standout feature is its brightness. Hisense's own claim is that it can reach 2,500 nits – although actually I measured closer to 2,700. This was on a 10 per cent white HDR window, too; not a tiny 2 per cent or 5 per cent window.

This makes the H75U9A the brightest consumer TV I've ever tested, which is surprising given that Hisense TVs have

generally struggled to be bright enough to do justice to HDR content. This flagship TV, by comparison, should make HDR fly, especially as it backs up its high brightness with a Quantum Dot wide colour system.

Lean, mean, 4K machine

Joining the Hisense's unusual spec sheet is an unusual design. This 4K megascreen straddles your AV furniture via a combination of a see-through 'lean-on' back support and a metallic bar that angles forward and down from the TV's bottom edge. Overall, it looks pretty nice; the main screen frame is opulently finished in a gleaming metallic bezel. But the screen does lean back slightly, which isn't something that will appeal to everyone.

Also jutting out from the H75U9A's bottom edge is a neat, full-width stereo (2 x 15W) soundbar that makes a good attempt at giving the TV's largescale visuals some equally big sonics. It handles the huge scale and detail of the *Mad Max: Fury Road* soundtrack with startling power and dynamism. Big action set-pieces are well projected, Max's gravelly voice is delivered with real authority, and the

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
A 75in 4K TV with HLG and HDR10 support

POSITION:
This is Hisense's flagship TV for the UK market

PEERS:
Sony KD-75XE9405;
Samsung QE65Q9FN;
LG OLED65C8

presentation is always full-bodied rather than harsh or thin. Impressive.

Connectivity is fair. The TV packs four HDMI inputs, two USB ports and wired and wireless network options. Yet only the two side-mounted HDMI inputs support 4K HDR signals up to 60Hz. The other two top out at 30Hz.

Smart features initially look basic. There aren't many apps to be found within Hisense's online hub, and the onscreen interface is a bit old school. However, Amazon

'The visual impact of the TV's super-size panel and its class-leading brightness is certainly a head-turner'

Video, Netflix, YouTube, Rakuten, Plex and Freeview Play are all present – and these are all most people will want, truth be told. The Amazon, Netflix and YouTube apps support 4K HDR.

My *Mad Max: Fury Road* 4K Blu-ray quickly reveals the picture benefits of the H75U9A's extreme high brightness. The film's desert locations look phenomenally intense; almost like you're looking through a window at a real sun-blasted dystopia.

This luminance hit is retained across the whole image, too; the TV's brightness capabilities aren't just restricted to the peaks of an (HLG or HDR10) HDR picture. Therefore there's no hint of the silhouetting effect you can experience with lower-luminance TVs when a dark HDR object stands against a bright backdrop. So, for instance, as Max looks down on a desert plain below, his form is much brighter and more detailed than it is on, say, LG's OLED77C8. The reach of the H75U9A's brightness also means it can deliver highlights, such as sun gleaming on chrome or direct shots of sunsets, without clipping tones or details.

Hisense's LED backlight setup helps it do a mostly decent job with black levels despite its potent illumination. It's capable of hitting near black colours during very dark sequences, and suffers less obvious 'blooming' and clouding when showing high-contrast content.

That's not to say that its backlight is as effective as I'd hoped. For instance, there's more dark scene greyness than you get with Samsung's Q9FN sets, and this is exacerbated if you don't set the Hisense's backlight to its highest local dimming setting. And during the scene where Max is tattooed in a cave, I did witness backlight 'blooming' spreading a good few inches away from bright objects.

I was also fairly often distracted by the LED dimming system's adjustments during dark scenes, and for all the huge number of dimming zones, sometimes quite large sections of the picture clearly exhibit a pronounced light shift. Samsung's QE65Q9FN, by comparison, suffers practically no blooming, and the workings of its backlight technology are much less visible.

Mostly impressive

While the H75U9A's dark scene performance doesn't quite live up to the promise of its huge number of dimming zones, it's still mostly impressive in the context of the

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD; satellite **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 2 x USB ports; RF input; headphone output; composite AV input; Ethernet; digital optical audio output **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 2 x 15W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 2,500 nits **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,677(w) x 1,005(h) x 114(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 44.5kg

FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi; USB/network multimedia playback; 1,056 individual dimming zones; HDCP 2.2 on all HDMI inputs; wide colour gamut; Quantum Dot technology; VIDAA smart portal includes Netflix, Amazon and Rakuten, plus Freeview Play; HDR Supreme; ULED backlight

PARTNER WITH



LG SK10Y: Although the Hisense's audio performance is solid, this £1,200 soundbar brings Dolby Atmos, optional expansion to 7.1 and a wireless subwoofer to the table. It measures over 1.4m wide, making it ideally suited to largescreen displays



TV world at large. But there are a couple of other problems to report.

Colours during HDR playback sometimes look strangely faded. The blues of *Fury Road*'s skies and the richness of the flames spewing from the modified vehicle engines all look bleached, while skin tones sometimes appear a little jaundiced. This is particularly true using the TV's HDR Day and HDR Night presets, but even the Dynamic mode doesn't look quite right. It's almost as if the screen's brightness is too much for the colour range of the Quantum Dot system to keep up with.

Another problem is that the H75U9A's pictures look strangely soft. During that opening shot where Max looks down across the desert, for instance, the foreground rocks look less crisply defined than they do on most 4K TVs. The desert in the distance looks overly smooth and unrefined, too, reducing the image's sense of depth. This lack of absolute, pristine sharpness is perhaps my biggest frustration, because the Hisense's motion handling, via its Film setting, is actually nicely clean and crisp.

Ready for its rivals?

These colour and sharpness weaknesses, plus some aggressive pricing on rivals such as Sony's 75in 75XE9405 (£3,250), Samsung's 65in 65Q9FN (£3,300) and LG's 65in C8 OLED (£3,300) mean I can only give Hisense's H75U9A a cautious rather than emphatic recommendation. At the same time, the visual impact of its super-size panel and class-leading brightness is certainly a head-turner ■

HCC VERDICT



Hisense H75U9A

→ £3,500 → www.hisense.co.uk

WE SAY: There's still room for improvement with the H75U9A, but this 4K bigscreen crushes any notions that Hisense is only a budget TV brand.

1. This flagship set is only available at 75in

2. A smaller, see-thru rear mount gives the H75U9A its 'floating' aesthetic

Deluxe DSP

Sony's HT-ZF9 soundbar wants to squeeze Dolby Atmos/DTS:X out of a 3.1-channel design. **Steve May** applauds its processing prowess



No upfiring drivers here,
just a trio of fronts



THE VERY IDEA seems preposterous. A 3.1-channel Dolby Atmos soundbar system that lacks upfiring speakers? Ridiculous.

But that's exactly what Sony offers here. The HT-ZF9 adopts a conventional bar and wireless sub approach, but uses DSP magic to create an immersive audio experience. It sells for £650, but can be upgraded with a pair of SA-Z9R wireless rears (£300) to create a discrete flatbed 5.1 system.

Placement is unfussy, as it doesn't use reflected sound to craft its soundstage. Most users will simply sit the HT-ZF9 in front of their TV, although it can be wall-mounted.

As expected at the price, the connections roster includes two HDMI inputs (offering HDCP 2.2 support), plus an HDMI (ARC) output. There's also an analogue stereo 3.5mm input, USB port, and optical digital audio input.

Bluetooth streaming is boosted by LDAC for compatible Sony devices, and you can also partner Bluetooth headphones for private

listening. Chromecast with Google Assistant is built-in, as is Wi-Fi.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
3.1-channel soundbar with Atmos decoding

POSITION:
Below the Atmos-enabled HT-ST5000

PEERS:
Samsung HW-N650; LG SK9Y

Vertical insanity

Setup is simple (there's no auto calibration required, although you should manually set the listening distance

and level) but operationally the HT-ZF9 is more contorted than a season of *Westworld*.

The 'bar uses a proprietary Vertical Sound Engine to create an immersive listening experience with Atmos and DTS:X content. The supplied remote control sports a big Vertical S button, but this doesn't actively engage the Vertical Sound Engine. Vertical S is a separate upmixer for two-channel and conventional 5.1 soundtracks.

You don't actually need to manually engage the Vertical Sound Engine for Atmos (or DTS:X) mixes. It's triggered automatically. Unless, of course, you've switched it off in order to use the Dolby Speaker Virtualiser (available in the audio menu), which is an alternate DSP confection devised by Dolby for soundbars that does much the same 3D audio thing. Confused? You will be.

The good news is that the Vertical Sound Engine actually does a remarkable job engorging the soundstage. Atmos movies play with exaggerated height and width – it's a big sound for such a small enclosure. The compact subwoofer, with its forward-facing 6.25in bass driver, has quite a kick too.

When Napoleon Solo stages his escape from East Berlin in *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (Blu-ray), this virtualised approach to Dolby Atmos works brilliantly well. The soundbar's sonic embrace creeps high and to the side. The jazzy score hangs like a drape, Solo's zipwire escape cutting through beneath. However, during my movie sessions I never once had a sense of overhead audio, seen

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 3 x forward-facing drivers
AMPLIFICATION (CLAIMED): 400W (total output power incl. subwoofer)
CONNECTIONS: 2 x HDMI inputs; HDMI output; optical digital audio input; 3 x USB ports; 3.5mm audio input **DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD**
MA: Yes/Yes **SEPARATE SUB:** Yes. 6.25in driver **REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 1,000(w) x 64(h) x 99(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 3.1kg

FEATURES: Dolby Atmos/DTS:X decoding; Vertical Sound Engine; wall-mountable; wireless subwoofer; Chromecast Built-in; Bluetooth (with LDAC); hi-res audio support; DSEE HX upscaling

by many as the ultimate embodiment of Dolby Atmos sonics.

Between you and me, Dolby's own Atmos virtualisation processing often sounds better. It's able to create the illusion of a soundstage that doesn't just go high and wide, but emphasises spatial depth. The downside is the listening position; it's sweet spot-dependent, unlike Sony's more inclusive Vertical Sound Engine. For most users, the Sony approach will be the best option.

With a non-immersive 5.1 soundtrack, that Vertical S mode widens the soundstage, and is fun with stereo music too. The system is compatible with hi-res audio sources, including DSD and 192kHz/24-bit FLAC. For lower-resolution streams Sony provides its proprietary DSEE HX upscaling.

Audio innovation

If you're expecting AVR-style Atmos thrills you'll probably be disappointed by the HT-ZF9, but it offers far more than the form factor suggests. Movie audio is painted large and sounds exciting, and even two-channel sources benefit from Sony's clever processing. Well-featured and innovative ■

HCC VERDICT



Sony HT-ZF9

→ £650 → www.sony.co.uk

WE SAY: If space is tight, this 3.1 Dolby Atmos solution sounds mightier than you might imagine. It's DSP wizardry done right.

CEDIA MEMBER

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Budget beamer does 1080p proud

The 4K revolution may be in full swing, but there's still a place for Full HD projection, believes **Jamie Carter** – especially when the cost of admission is so low

WHY WOULD ANYONE buy a Full HD projector? Ultra HD Blu-ray discs and 4K Blu-ray players have been on sale for a couple of years; Netflix, Amazon and others now stream in 4K; and it's becoming increasingly difficult to buy a TV that doesn't have a 3,840 x 2,160 pixel resolution. Meanwhile, 4K projectors have become drastically more affordable over the past six months. And all these add HDR into the mix.

So 4K is the future, right? Absolutely, but there is still a place for Full HD. The proof is right here in this diminutive DLP projector, which is at the vanguard of a new trend to significantly undercut the 4K format. Yes, its 1,920 x 1,080 pixel resolution equates to just a two megapixel image – not comparing well to the eight megapixels that UHD offers – but the HD27e's price of around £550 makes it less than half the cost of even a budget 4K model.

It's also less than half the weight. At just 2.9kg, this Optoma

is easy to transport between rooms, floors and even properties (an optional carrier bag is also available), although what really aids its versatility is its brightness. Essentially a much brighter version of the previous Optoma HD27 (released in 2016), this variant claims a peak output of 3,400 Lumens, making it potentially one of the punchiest projectors around. Add to that a built-in 10W speaker, and compatibility with dongles like Amazon Fire TV and Google Chromecast via its powered USB port, and the HD27e starts to look like a projector that is built for convenience and ease of use rather than image perfection. So: would you want to run your Blu-rays through it?

Vertically challenged

Before going big with BD, you have to get the HD27e set up. This isn't a taxing process, but some feature short-falls don't make it ideal for all environments. It's acceptable that there's no motorised zoom or autofocus here (features reserved for pricier models), but the absence of any lens shift option means you're tasked with getting the PJ square on to your screen, or making do with its vertical keystone correction software.



Optoma suggests the HD27e can produce a monstrous 300in image, but that's going way over the top for a Full HD resolution device, is too big for the majority of rooms, and probably beyond the PJ's maximum luminance. Many buyers will instead be looking at an image between 80in-100in, and there's less flexibility here than you might hope. The Optoma's lens and 1.1x zoom result in a throw ratio of 1.47-162:1, which means for

'This projector's 1080p image may lack the sharpness of rival 4K displays, but is always enjoyable'

a screen size of 100in, you're pegged to a projection distance of 3.25m to 3.6m. As always, it's a case of measuring up before you buy.

Adding to its legacy reputation, the HD27e is 3D ready. Compatible with the DLP Link active shutter 3D system, using the HD27e in 3D mode requires purchasing Optoma's ZD302 3D glasses, which can be found for around £45. None were supplied for this audition.

For a budget projector the HD27e is reasonably well connected. Around the back are two HDMI inputs (both version 1.4), the aforementioned USB port, and a 3.5mm jack for taking audio from the projector to an external sound system.

There is also a 12V trigger for merging the HD27e with a home cinema control system. Talking of control, this projector ships with a tiny, but otherwise impressive remote that's backlit by red LEDs as soon as one of its buttons is pressed.

Cinema thrills

Used in the Cinema mode in a blacked-out room with the gorgeous *Hacksaw Ridge* on Blu-ray, the HD27e impresses with its realism and contrast. Its colour handling (the projector claims full delivery of the REC.709 colour space) is solid, with an even, well-balanced approach across the palette. Activating BrilliantColor processing, a bonus feature of Texas Instruments' DLP tech, didn't add much in this instance; for critical movie viewing the HD27e seems fine without it.

The nighttime sequences of Desmond Doss making repeated visits to the battlefield to save wounded soldiers have plenty of contrast, with just enough shadow detail in murky areas to give the image an involving depth.

Motion performance is also creditable. Blur wasn't a major issue, with detail generally retained during camera pans and fast motion. This 1080p image may lack the ultimate sharpness of rival 4K displays, but is always enjoyable.



SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active shutter **4K:** No. 1,920 x 1,080 **HDR:** No **CONNECTIONS:** 2 x HDMI inputs; powered USB port; 12V trigger; 3.5mm audio jack **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 3,400 Lumens **CONTRAST (CLAIMED):** 25,000:1 **ZOOM:** 1.1x **DIMENSIONS:** 316(w) x 108(h) x 244(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 2.87kg

FEATURES: DLP technology; built-in 10W speaker; 25dB claimed fan noise; 1.47:1-1.62:1 throw ratio; backlit remote control; vertical keystone correction; manual zoom; REC.709 colour delivery; 24fps playback; MHL HDMI support; lamp life rated at 3,500 hours (Bright), 12,000 hours (Dynamic), 10,000 hours (Eco); image presets include Game, Vivid, Bright, Cinema and 3D; auto power off; wireless transmission support

PARTNER WITH



HACKSAW RIDGE: Mel Gibson's startling true-life WWII drama mixes brutal action with gorgeous cinematography, making its BD release indispensable. Lionsgate's 2017 platter also packs a visceral Dolby Atmos soundtrack.

Employed in daylight – surely the HD27e's party trick – proved a little disappointing by comparison. The searing impact of its claimed 3,400 Lumens brightness never materialised in practice, and the image created in a light-filled room (while watching a few World Cup football matches on BBC One HD) lacked the panache of its earlier movie performance, with a less assured approach to colour and contrast. Things improve with BrilliantColor engaged, and the Game and Vivid modes provide alternatives for viewing in ambient light.

The HD27e actually surprised with audio. Not only is it noticeably quieter in operation than many rivals, its built-in 10W speaker delivers a sound performance that's easy on the ear and up to the task of filling a small room. Tested with games, films and broadcast TV, it always lacked musicality and breadth, but there was plenty of clarity with voices and other details. In short, this projector has a far better speaker than most.

A decision to make

There's quite a lot to like about the HD27e, although I'd rate it a better performer in dark-room conditions. For those with large BD collections and no interest in 'stepping up' to 4K, it delivers a cinematic experience at a bargain price. At the same time, if you've already got a 4K TV, a Netflix plan, a 4K Blu-ray spinner and a stack of Ultra HD Blu-ray discs, the HD27e will surely feel like a step down, despite its ability to create genuinely largescale images.

It has the usual budget trappings (a meagre zoom, lack of lens shift) that might hinder its installation, and pushing its lamp to its extremes doesn't always reward, but couple the generally strong picture performance with its excellent built-in audio, HDMI dongle support and compact form factor, and the HD27e is hassle-free home cinema ■

HCC VERDICT



Optoma HD27e

→ £550 → www.optoma.co.uk

WE SAY: It may only deliver Full HD pictures, but this good-value all-in-one projector can still cut the Blu-ray mustard. Not quite the bright star you might expect, though.

Bedside manna

Steve May is enamoured by Amazon's cutest smart assistant



The Echo Spot packs a 1.4in full-range driver

IT'S EASY TO overlook Amazon's Echo Spot. It's not overtly a living room smart speaker, like its bigger Echo brothers, and it doesn't have a (relatively) largescreen display like the Echo Show. To all intents and purposes it appears to be a bedside clock, albeit one with delusions of grandeur.

You see, this dinky sphere is a veritable pokeball when it comes to feisty talents. Not only does it have all the connected functionality of its Echo stablemates, but it's video-savvy too.

The late, late show

Available in black or white, the £120 Echo Spot could conceivably be employed on a work desk or in a kitchen. However, it's most obviously a bedside companion. In the evening, the display dims automatically, becoming almost unreadable in the dead of night (you

can override this if you need to).

In terms of design and build, it's slick and polished. Sitting on a flat base, the 10cm circular orb presents a sharp, colourful screen to the world. There are top-mounted physical buttons for volume control and mic/

camera activation; you can disable the camera completely in settings if you're paranoid about Alexa spying on you during the night, or simply don't require the Spot's video calling feature.

Naturally, being an Alexa device, you're meant to chat to it, and the Spot's second-generation far-field voice recognition microphones mean it doesn't struggle to hear. In addition to Alexa voice control, there's a 3.5mm audio line output, and Bluetooth transmission to third-party loudspeakers.

Setup takes just a few minutes over Wi-Fi using the Amazon Alexa app. I won't go into any great detail about the feature set, as it's really no different to what we've seen on other Alexa products, although it lacks the built-in smart hub of the all-new Echo speakers, and so won't work solo with Zigbee smart home products.

But there is a plethora of skills available, including as managing connected thermostats or controlling smart lighting, such as Philips' Hue range. Given the form factor though, it's likely that other duties will be paramount – perhaps playing audio books or setting wake-up calls.

When it comes to audio playback, the Echo Spot is actually quite impressive. It sounds a good deal better than the budget Echo Dot model, by virtue of a larger 1.4in driver design, and has enough volume to be comfortably heard in a moderately sized room.

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVERS: 1 x 1.4in full-range driver

AMPLIFICATION (CLAIMED): N/A

SCREEN: 480 x 480 resolution, colour

CONNECTIONS: 3.5mm audio output

DIMENSIONS: 104(w) x 97(h) x 91(d)mm

WEIGHT: 420g

FEATURES: Amazon Alexa compatible; second-generation far-field voice recognition; dual-band Wi-Fi support; Bluetooth connection; integrated camera (video calling to Alexa devices); compatible with Philips Hue, WeMo, SmartThings, Ring, Arlo, Nest; Alexa app (Fire OS, iOS, Android)

You can use it to play music from popular services such as Spotify and TuneIn. It will even show music lyrics when streaming content from Amazon Music.

But here's the thing: the Echo Spot is also a video display. Any video content on Amazon Prime can be played back on its diddy (64mm wide) 480 x 480 pixel screen. It's a bit of an odd experience, as widescreen images are centralised with their edges trimmed for the circular display, but you quickly grow accustomed to it.

So what to use it for? I found myself catching up on late-night anime and checking out the latest movie trailers (although admittedly 2.40:1 clips look pretty small). Pictures are sharp enough, with vibrant colour. Any fears that this might be a second-division LCD display are quickly dispelled.

One drawback is that, because of the ongoing spat between Amazon and Google, there's no YouTube app support. But you can ask the Spot to play music videos. It searches via Bing, then plays what it finds – these tend to stream within a smaller 4:3 ratio display.

You can also view game-streaming site Twitch (which is also owned by Amazon), or add MTV UK News to your flash briefing, arguably the slickest video news package available for the Spot.

Surprisingly entertaining

Amazon's Echo Spot may seem an unlikely addition to any AV armoury, and purists will snigger at its video implementation, but it's actually surprisingly useful and entertaining. Quite apart from all the smart home gubbins, it allows you to watch *The Grand Tour* on a bedside clock. And for that bombshell alone, warrants a thumbs up ■

HCC VERDICT



Amazon Echo Spot

→ £120 → www.amazon.co.uk

WE SAY: The diminutive Echo Spot is a smart speaker unlike any other. And as a bedside companion, it's uniquely entertaining.

19  25

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Ribbon is a dancer

Monitor Audio's CP-IW460X promises premium cabinet speaker performance from a discreet in-wall design. **Richard Stevenson** gets out the jigsaw to investigate

THERE IS NO denying that in-wall and in-ceiling speakers make for the slickest-looking home cinema room. Yet 'affordable' in-walls have rarely delivered the sonic Oscars of a big-box traditional loudspeaker package.

Monitor Audio's Controlled Performance in-wall loudspeaker line aims to change all that, and the imposing flagship model tested here – while an obvious LCR choice – is suitable for all channels, save perhaps Atmos overheads, with a flush-fit and paintable grille that makes it all but disappear into your room. While I would hesitate to call the CP-IW460X, at £1,300 each, even remotely affordable, its less fancy sibling, the CP-IW260X, is also less fiscally painful at £850 a pop.

So what's the difference? The CP-IW460X gets a whole bunch of tech derived from MA's Platinum series speakers, including a C-CAM (Ceramic-Coated Magnesium/Aluminium) ribbon tweeter, C-CAM drivers with RST (Rigid Surface Technology) dimpled cones, and a top-drawer crossover.

The step-down CP model features smooth, continuous-profile driver cones, a more traditional 25mm gold dome tweeter and an acronym inferiority complex.

Key to both models is the large, sealed polymer enclosure with die-cast aluminium front baffle. That is a speaker cabinet to you and me, making the CP series very much 'proper' speakers that can be mounted flush into

your walls. The sealed cabinet design eliminates the vagaries of how the drivers interact with the void behind the wall, leading to a much more predictable sound.

The driver lineup is two 6.5in woofers and two 4in midrange units, set either side of the central tweeter. Mounted vertically, this D'Appolito configuration gives a wide and smooth dispersion pattern, ideal for delivering surround sound across multiple seating positions. The ribbon tweeter pod can be rotated through 90 degrees, allowing the speaker to be installed horizontally.

The CP-IW460X's high 89dB sensitivity and 150W power handling afford it claimed peak volumes to over 110dB per speaker, while LF response is rated down to 50Hz. Switches on the baffle give you +1dB/0/-1dB trims on both the high-frequency and mid-frequency response. A Boundary Gain Compensation switch is also there to peg back low frequencies. If you have neighbours, that is going to be very useful.

Paint it black – if you want

The speaker comes supplied with a trim-less magnetic grille. It's in a white finish, but you can brush over with whatever shade you like, allowing you to match the colour of your room or get artistic. Of course, you have to install them first.

Each cabinet weighs in at over 12kg and requires a wall cut-out of 878mm x 228mm. That is a mighty big hole and

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Full-range in-wall
loudspeaker

POSITION:
Flagship of the
Controlled
Performance line

PEERS:
KEF Ci3160RL-THX;
SpeakerCraft Profile
AIM Cinema Five;
DALI Phantom S-180

poorly supported plasterboard probably isn't going to cut it as a solid baffle. You can use MA's optional WB12 pre-construction bracket to firm up a plasterboard mounting, but if you are after the ultimate performance you want a solid surface. Building a false wall is the way ahead.

I popped up a false wall using 50mm x 100mm timber and 12mm ply-wood with finishing plasterboard layered over the top. Such a design is cheap and effective, and even my limited DIY skills managed to create a great foundation for the speaker. More good news is that these models only require 102mm mounting depth from the wall surface, so your false wall won't need to shrink your room dimensions too much.

The speaker is supplied with a cut-out template, complete with guide lines to where each driver will be. Given the wide horizontal dispersion and limited vertical output, make sure the tweeters of any CP-IW460X installed vertically are at about ear-height when seated.

Assuming you haven't cut through water pipes, electricity cables or your speaker wires and are looking at a large rectangular opening, fitting the CP-IW460X is remarkably easy. It has 10 dog-leg clamps that turn out and lock behind the surface as they are tightened up. If you need to remove them (maybe you forgot to hookup the speaker cables to the spring binding posts...) unscrew the lugs cautiously. Go too far and the plastic clip will drop off and be forever lost in the dim recesses of your wall cavity.

Here comes Dino

In full flight, the CP-IW460X is energetic and exciting, and punches home midrange effects like few other in-walls models I've heard. The sealed cabinet design is a triumph and MA's premium driver lineup delivers true audiophile-quality sound.

Jurassic World (Blu-ray) is given suitably dinosaur-like scale; feisty, bitey and imposing. You are never going to get fear-inducing bass from dino-footsteps but the MAs have a big signature even without a subwoofer. Despite the film being mind-bogglingly predictable (spoiler alert: the dinosaurs start eating people) and lacking Spielberg's magic, these immersive loudspeakers keep the whole thing moving along at a pace, and make the puddle-shallow characters vaguely relatable.

That ribbon tweeter is as smooth as silk, giving female voices in particular an excellent sense of realism. Even with lines as idiotic as 'Corporate thought genetic modification would add the wow factor,' Claire (Bryce Dallas Howard) sounds engaging and believable – certainly more believable than most of the rest of the movie. Orientated horizontally for centre channel duties, the CP-IW460X keeps dialogue snapped tightly to the screen, but voices do loose some projection and authority as you move left or right from the hot seat.

For a relatively compact sealed cabinet, the CP-IW460X's bass is remarkably well extended. It doesn't get down to around the 50Hz mark as Monitor Audio's specification suggests, but it does hit tight and hard from 70Hz up, which is easy subwoofer-integration territory. The bass boost from in-wall installation is notable and

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 6.5in C-CAM/RST bass drivers; 2 x 4in C-CAM/RST midrange drivers; 1 x C-CAM ribbon tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed in-wall with die-cast aluminium baffle **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 50Hz-60kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 89dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 150W **DIMENSIONS:** 257(w) x 907(h) x 105(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 12.9kg

FEATURES: 10 x Tri-Grip dog-leg fixings; 90-degree rotating tweeter pod; vertical or horizontal placement; D'Appolito driver configuration; Boundary Gain Compensation switch; +1dB/-1dB trim for HF and MF; cut-out template; flush-fit magnetic paintable grille

PARTNER WITH



MONITOR AUDIO CP-WT380:

Looking for something a little smaller for surround channel duties? This two-way in-wall CP model (£360 each) uses an RST bass driver and gold dome tweeter, and the same Tri-Grip mounting system as its bigger brother.



nicely evens up what could have otherwise been a slightly forward overall balance. Maybe leave that BDC switch set to off and ignore the neighbours' complaints.

I experimented with the other trim switches but quickly found the limited +/- 1dB controls made very little sonic difference during movie playback. The CP-IW460X's up-front sound has great projection into the room, and -1dB on HF and MF did nothing to dampen that enthusiasm. In a small room, where you are close to the speakers, this mid/high delivery might prove a little too much. Yet give them at least 2-3m from your seating position and the D'Appolito array never fails to impress with its dynamic and engaging stance.

That balance might suggest the MAs are dedicated to all-action blockbusters, but not so. Stepping back to 2009's *Moon* on Blu-ray, these speakers don't shy away from eking out intense ambience and small details in almost every one of Sam Bell's actions. From gently opened kitchen cupboards to Sam's stilted dialogue with the service rover, the sound is authentic and cohesive.

Engaging experience

If you want all-but-invisible surround sound speakers without compromising performance, Monitor Audio's CP-IW460X should be up there on your audition list. At £6,500 for a five-channel system and over £9,000 for seven, they are not exactly cheap, but that isn't an outrageous price for such high-performance in-wall models. The brand's loudspeaker know-how shines through in the design and an impressively detailed and engaging surround sound experience ■

HCC VERDICT



Monitor Audio CP-IW460X

→ £1,300 → www.monitoraudio.com

WE SAY: The CP-IW460X is a large, easy-to-install sealed cabinet in-wall speaker with punchy bass and smooth ribbon tweeter that delivers an energetic, up-front sound.

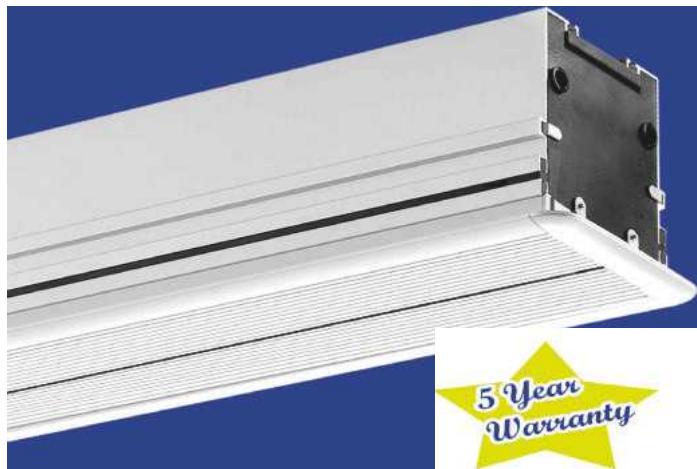
1. When using the speaker as a centre channel, the ribbon tweeter can rotate 90 degrees

2. The speakers mount to a fairly shallow depth of 102mm



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Digital Copy

There's one thing your home cinema has that even the best commercial cinema doesn't, says **Mark Craven** – its ability to be tailored to suit your eyes, your ears and your bladder

RECENTLY I WAS fortunate enough to enjoy two very impressive – yet different – cinematic experiences. One, a premium home theatre installation; the other, an IMAX Laser screening. Which was better? Well, it's complicated.

First came a demonstration of a domestic Dolby Atmos setup, using Steinway Lyngdorf speakers, Lyngdorf processing, and a Sony 4K projector. This was actually one of four systems I sampled at Steinway Lyngdorf's UK distributor Gecko Home Cinema during an afternoon. I was made to feel like a VIP, but considering the price of some of the Steinway Lyngdorf catalogue, that's not a surprise.

This particular array, using the brand's Model S speakers and boundary subwoofers, sounded superb, and the visuals were exquisite. The opening Zero attack sequence from *Unbroken* was a smorgasbord of crisp fidelity, unwavering tonality and hemispherical immersion – completed by nuanced yet deep, deep bass.

Around 24 hours later I was in Sheffield to view *Solo: A Star Wars Story* in the IMAX Laser screen at Cineworld – one of only two such screens in the UK (the other being in London's Leicester Square). As an experience, this was, outwardly, the polar opposite. **This theatre has hundreds of seats and a screen the size of a small country** – it dwarfed the cinema room I'd been in the day before. Yet both setups offer the same thing. Watching a movie.

The IMAX Laser projection was remarkably clean and sharp, and the sound system unearthed astonishing levels of scale, dimensionality and impact across the frequency range. I was in cinematic heaven.

The ticket price was £17, but I honestly don't mind paying that sort of premium if the alternative

is saving a fiver and cramming into an unloved, unimpressive auditorium carved out of a multiplex. I'm more annoyed about the cost of a bag of M&Ms.

Size isn't everything

But here's the thing. While IMAX's bespoke dual-laser projector system yields visuals that no home cinema can really counter (the size of the screen, naturally, has something to do with it), did the full-size, multichannel audio performance outgun that of the Steinway Lyngdorf array?

Not in all departments. At times it sounded impossibly huge, and – where other vanilla commercial cinemas can sound as if they're missing out on surround info – wonderfully immersive, but the Steinway Lyngdorf system edged it in terms of clarity, timing and imaging.

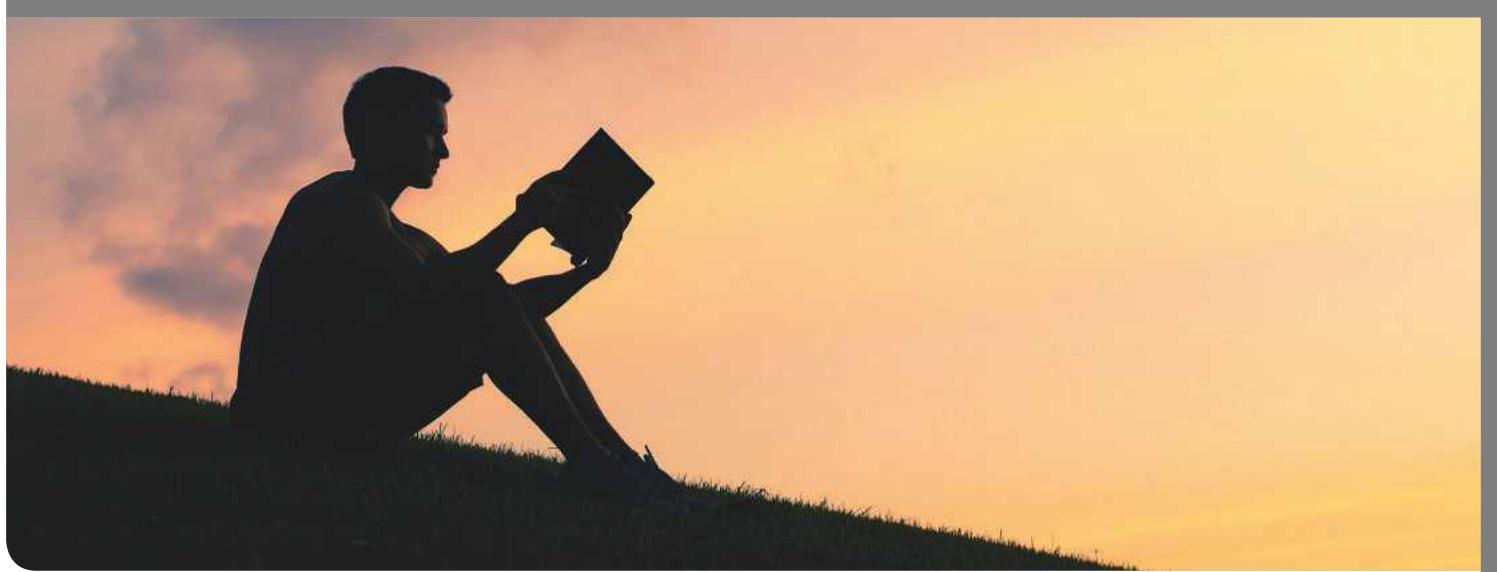
The reason no doubt comes down to EQ and calibration. IMAX's speaker system, running to 12 channels, attempts to create an audio sweet spot that covers multiple, multiple positions. In the Steinway Lyngdorf demo, I was sitting in the prime listening position, hearing a speaker/processor combo that had been set up to target that exact seat with pin-point precision.

This is surely part of what makes home cinema so fabulous. It's a personal experience that can be tailored to just you. If, for some reason, you want to listen with your subwoofer so loud that it drowns out everything else, you can. If you fancy viewing with your TV in Dynamic mode, you can. And, most obviously, you can pause/rewind/skip a movie to your heart's content. No commercial cinema manager, no matter how politely you ask, is going to halt a presentation just so you can nip to the toilet. ■

What do you love the most about your home cinema setup? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Mark Craven
is planning a tour of the UK's premium commercial cinemas. He is also planning to smuggle in his own snacks





Film Fanatic

When he's not watching movies, **Anton van Beek** loves to kick back with a good book – especially when they offer alternate versions of some classic films...

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE moment in *Predator*? Is it Dutch and Dillon's unforgettable bicep-bulging handshake? Or the scene where the surviving members of the team unleash their firepower on the jungle following Blain's death? Or what about the final act, where Dutch throws a spear straight through the Predator's head as it flees to its spacecraft, hitting something in the vessel in the process and causing it to explode?

"Wait a minute," you're thinking, "that's not what happened at the end of *Predator*." Well spotted. But while it isn't how the film ends, it is how the climax plays out in Paul Monette's 1987 novelisation, and is one of many differences between movie and book – the most notable probably being that, in the novelisation, the titular creature isn't an invisible alien hunting people for sport, but is instead an otherworldly shape-shifter dissecting the humans it kills in order to understand how we function.

I still remember an annoying classmate boasting that he'd snuck in to a cinema screening of *Predator* and regaling us with details he'd evidently pulled from the novelisation. Naturally, when the rest of us finally got to see the movie on VHS, we discovered he'd been fibbing.

So why did this plot overhaul happen? Obviously a *Predator* novelisation was knocked up so it would be in stores at the same time as the film was in cinemas, and poor Paul Monette was working with an early script that was significantly revised (for the better) on its way to the silver screen.

Predator is far from the only film novelisation to diverge from its source material. Consider, for instance, William Kotzwinkle's take on family film classic *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, a substantial part of which is told from the titular creature's point

of view – and even has the alien falling in love with Elliot's mother (who it dubbed 'Willow Creature').

And then there's James Kahn's adaptation of *Return of the Jedi*, where, during the visit to Dagobah, the ghost of Obi-Wan Kenobi tells Luke all about his fateful final fight with Anakin. This left a generation of young fans picturing how awesome that scene would have looked on the bigscreen, and what played out in our heads was far more exciting than what George Lucas finally gave us in 2005.

Novelisations can also prove handy when it comes to circumventing censorship. If you've ever watched Hammer's *The Terror of the Tongs* (see p102) and wondered what was actually happening during Helena Sale's death scene before the censors got stuck in (especially as the snipped footage is now believed lost), you can track down a copy of Jimmy Sangster's 1962 novelisation and read all the grisly details.

Movies on the go

The glory days of the film novelisation are long behind us, though. Before home video really took off, they were the only way of revisiting your favourite flicks whenever you wanted to. Now, rather than packing a book, you can download *E.T.* to your smartphone or tablet, and not have to worry about him trying to woo middle-aged women.

But I'll always have a fascination with film novelisations – both the good and the bad – for offering a glimpse of alternate versions of stories that we already think we know inside and out. If you ever see me lurking in your local charity shop, you'll know what I'm hunting for ■

Do you have a favourite movie novelisation? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Anton van Beek
can't believe that the *Prometheus* novelisation was only released in Japan – leaving a big gap in his *Alien* book collection





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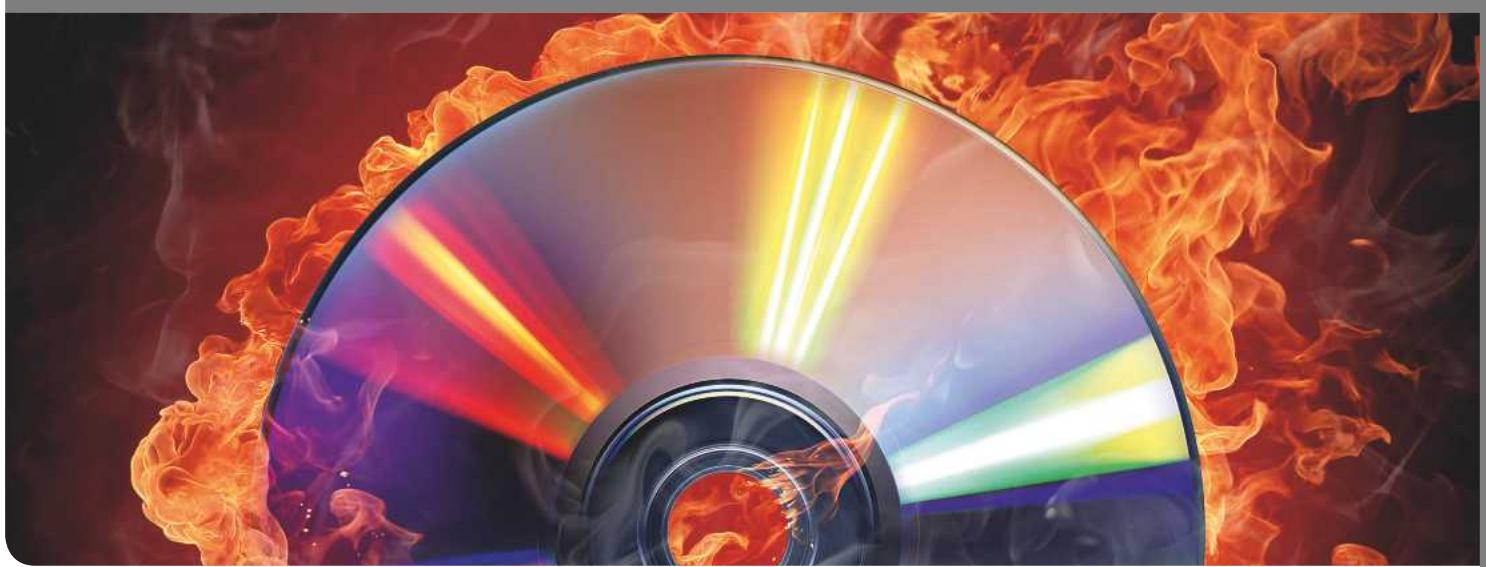


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In The Mix

Jon Thompson loves everything about physical media, down to the shiny discs themselves. So he's pleased to see tech developments striving for better quality – and the capacity for 8K

YOU CAN KEEP your soya double-decaf latte, I want full-fat full-strength – how it's supposed to be! And I feel the same way about physical media. I want the best picture, sound and, of course, the packaging. I don't want some watered-down streamed version playing through a soundbar.

As reported on p12, physical media is in pretty good health. Streaming media killed the video shop, not physical formats (I hated video shops mainly as you had to remember to take the tapes back. The funniest thing was when Blockbuster put a sticker on DVDs saying 'Please rewind.' Any company that stupid was bound to go the way of the dinosaurs).

Anyway, the 12cm digital disc – first introduced in 1982 as a Compact Disc for audio – has not really changed in its method of manufacturing. We've seen CDs develop into DVD, then Blu-ray, then UHD Blu-ray, all using the same pressing process. Well, almost.

UHQCD technology is a development from Memory-Tech Corp, one of the largest CD manufacturers in Japan. It employs a different disc material than traditional CD (photopolymer, rather than polycarbonate), and a blue laser rather than red laser for 'cutting' master discs. This, and a refined cutting process, aims to reduce errors. Yes, your silver discs have errors – they are not perfect, unlike the myth that was put around by PR teams in the 1980s that this was a perfect media. And minimising errors in the master helps improve error rates and ultimately produces better sound and pictures.

The Japanese consumer electronics industry has an obsession with physical media, just like me. I love the feeling of owning something. There is nothing like going into a store and seeing racks of titles to browse. I was recently in Dublin, which still has a Tower

Records; with its rows and rows of DVDs, Blu-rays, 4K Blu-rays, CDs and vinyl records it was like going back in time. I love the future as long as we don't throw away the past.

Third time lucky

One use of UHQCD so far has been for MQA (Master Quality Authenticated) CDs, as a way of getting high-quality into the mainstream. MQA was developed by Meridian Audio, which also developed MLP (Meridian Lossless Packing) compression, used in DVD-Audio and then Dolby TrueHD. And it's gaining traction via this physical side as well as its streaming iteration, with high-end disc-spinners (such as Oppo's UDP-205) firmware updated to play MQA CDs.

But what really excites me is that there's no reason why the UHQCD process could not be used for DVDs, Blu-rays and UHD Blu-rays, theoretically providing a much more robust data stream from the disc. We are, after all, in the middle of a resurgence in almost all physical media. Okay, I am not expecting to see 8-track tape make a comeback or VHS resurrected, but Sony, for one, has a major investment in physical media and optical discs going back to 1982, so it would be foolish (after losing out on so many other formats like Betamax), to give up on silver platters now.

Indeed, Sony and Panasonic are already working on a disc with the capacity of 1TB, and I can imagine this being the basis of an 8K format, because if you thought UHD Blu-ray was going to be the last physical media, think again. With the strength of the market in Japan, and the Far East in general, 8K UHD discs may actually happen ■

How many Blu-rays do you have in your collection? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

When he's not in his screening room, **Jon Thompson** tweets about Hollywood gossip, movie-making and digital mastering at [@johnnyfocal](https://twitter.com/johnnyfocal)



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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current tech? Want to share your knowledge with our readers? **Team HCC** is here to help

Letting off some steam!

Hi there Team HCC. I found Jon Thompson's article [*In the Mix, HCC #288*] interesting – he mirrors my opinion on 4K. None of it has blown me away either. As he says, it has the space and potential but the studios are the wrong tools to implement it.

I think the AV industry is lazy. It doesn't research what could be done for the best results. Just do a quick transfer, stamp it 4K, add on more money and off it goes to retailers.

We went through the same process with Blu-ray, now they are having to do the lazy titles again. Same again with Blu-ray 3D, the best tech the Blu-ray Disc Association has ever come up with in my opinion (4K is nothing compared to it – 4K 3D? Now you're talking!). The lazy gene is applied. It had a great start, with demo discs to die for leading potential customers to think all the movies were going to be like this. No way – *Avatar* set the standard and it was downhill after that with lazy ret-con rubbish. This made people lose interest in it.

Now they realise if they want to sell the same title four times they have to include a so-called 3D release to keep the numbers up. And now the twits are talking 8K.

A stellar soundtrack

Hi. I loved the article on the Top 30 Movie Soundtracks [*HCC #288*] – nice to see *Enter The Dragon* amongst them. One of my all-time favourite soundtracks is from the film *Starman*, composed by Jack Nitzsche. Track 14 *Starman Leaves/End Titles* is one of the most beautiful pieces of music composed for a movie. If anyone is after the CD, it's on the That's Entertainment Records label, catalogue number TER 1097. I don't know if it is still available, but if you collect soundtracks, this one is worth tracking down!

Paul, Plymouth

Anton van Beek replies: Thanks Paul. *Starman* is one of only a few John Carpenter movies where he didn't compose the soundtrack (*The Thing*, which was scored by Ennio Morricone, is another). It's a cracking film too. I might have to dig out my BD for a re-watch!



Was it all downhill for 3D after *Avatar*?

In the end we pay the price for an out-of-touch approach to something that could be so great. Get used to disappointment.

Fred

Mark Craven replies: Although it sounds a little like you got out of bed the wrong side this

morning Fred, I agree with you when it comes to studios being lazy. We see the same titles released and re-released across formats, or in different packaging, while others are seemingly ignored.

The reason for this, of course, is that studios have profit lines to reach and they know what



Sony Pictures released *Starman* on UK Blu-ray last year

sells and what doesn't. When a film is given a 25th Anniversary Collector's Edition release to follow its previous 20th Anniversary Collector's Edition release, it's because it's known it will make a profit.

As my colleagues Anton van Beek and Jon Thompson routinely remind me, this is where 'boutique' labels can make their mark. Obviously they too have to be profitable, but by adopting limited edition release strategies and adding plenty of value through extra features and packaging, they appear to be thriving while releasing the less well-known titles that bigger, more inflexible studios would probably deem risky.

It's this situation that leaves us with an independent label like Scream Factory prepping a *Critters* 1-4 Blu-ray boxset this November, while the rights to the movies reside with, presumably, Warner Bros (which has acquired original *Critters* studio New Line Cinema).

If you are looking for 4K UHD Blu-ray releases that are the best (picture quality-wise) that the format currently has to offer, turn to page 23 for Steve Withers' roundup. Maybe some of these will float your boat.

As for 8K, as a technology for delivering movies into your living room, this is still a way off. So don't worry about it. Yet.

3D isn't dead!

Okay, I officially have a 'pain in me hole' as we say over here. No more 3D TV? Major TV manufacturers drop 3D? Then why are all major studios still filming in 3D?

The new *Godzilla* movie next May will show in IMAX 3D. I'm sure nearly all the major movies between now and then are also in 3D.

What does Optoma (my favourite projector brand) do? It releases a 4K projector with 3D – the UHD51 – so why still all the talk of the demise of what I think is a wonderful addition to home cinema?

Is it time to contact Warner Bros, Universal, etc, and ask them what their plans are for 3D? I for one will continue to fight for this great format loved by so many home cinema enthusiasts. Cheers again for a great mag.

Peter Brennan

Mark Craven replies: As I've discussed before, 3D is still a big deal for commercial cinemas. There's been plenty of investment in 3D projection technologies across the globe, meaning a demand is there for content that multiplexes can then charge a premium for. Audiences generally seem happy to attend 3D screenings too – it's very much become part of the cinema landscape.

A lot of movies are therefore still being converted to 3D in post-production, including the aforementioned *Godzilla: King of Monsters*, even while the idea of shooting natively in 3D has largely fallen out of favour. You're probably

Star Letter...

4K football: a game of two halves

I wasn't that impressed with the BBC iPlayer World Cup 4K UHD trial. While the previous recorded *Blue Planet II* content looked great, as does Netflix 4K, the 'live' World Cup matches suffered in the frame rate. It looked like it was only 25fps and thus quite jerky. The motion of the ball in particular was unwatchable, although the increased resolution was very good and noticeable, as was the HLG HDR, mainly in close-ups.

It was similar with the more 'static' motion of the Wimbledon content. I switched back to HD which was much more watchable and had smoother natural motion despite being in archaic 50i. I was actually looking forward to the progressive frame rate of 50fps for the first time rather than the increased resolution.

For the record I am on BT Infinity, 37Mbps, which may be the reason for the drop in frame rate?

I watched it on a 2015 Panasonic 55CX802B TV via its built in iPlayer app.

Regards another thing that Mark Craven mentioned in his article in *HCC* #288 [Digital Copy] – the delay between actual live and delivered content is getting bigger and more noticeable. I think only old analogue live broadcasts were truly 'live'. Digital SD lagged, then HD lagged more, then iPlayer and now iPlayer UHD which lagged even more. This is why I never bother watching the Big Ben New Year's Eve countdown on BBC HD!

I must have annoyed my neighbours during the England v Sweden World Cup Quarter-Final, cheering 30 seconds ahead watching on BBC HD while they were watching on iPlayer in the back garden. I think they gave up and went inside!

Kevin Mullarkey, Stretford

right to say 'nearly all' the major movies released now are offered in a 3D guise.

So when people describe 3D as 'dead' or 'dying' it's usually in regards to home entertainment – and by that I mean TVs and broadcasting rather than the niche world of home cinema projection. For the high street shopper looking to buy a new TV, 3D is surely not a consideration. This means it's certainly good news for home AV fans that the likes of Optoma and BenQ are maintaining 3D playback on their 4K projector lines.

Anton van Beek replies: Slightly related to Mark Craven's answer to the previous letter, but I'm sure the plans of Warner Bros and

Mark Craven replies:

Football games are probably the only thing that I still strive to watch live – most of my TV viewing is done via on-demand or from a recording. For the new season of *Unforgotten* on ITV (awesome police procedural series, in case you aren't aware of it), I've taken to starting viewing at around 9.15pm so I can then skip through the advert breaks. Yes, I am that sad.

The BBC will work towards getting its 4K 'live' streams up to speed, but don't expect them to ever arrive at a zero-latency (or close to zero) transmission.

All the BBC's 4K football streams were at 50fps, according to the corporation. Anyone using a less than optimal broadband connection should have received a reduced resolution, but not a reduction in frame rate. For instance, the Beeb says a 10Mbps connection would yield 1,920 x 1,080 at 50fps (and your 37Mbps broadband should have just about been enough for the full-fat 3,840 x 2,160 at 50fps).

That's not to say I disagree with your verdict, and the BBC itself has reported comments regarding frame rates and motion that 'surprised us'. But as it was adamant it was streaming in native 50fps, there's obviously work to be done understanding what went wrong for some viewers. Which is the benefit of these types of trial.

Star letter-writer Kevin grabs a copy of Paddy Considine's acclaimed new drama *Journeyman* on Blu-ray. The story of a former boxer who faces the toughest fight of his last following a devastating injury received in the ring, this incredibly powerful and affecting film is out now on Blu-ray, DVD, Digital Download and VOD courtesy of Studiocanal.

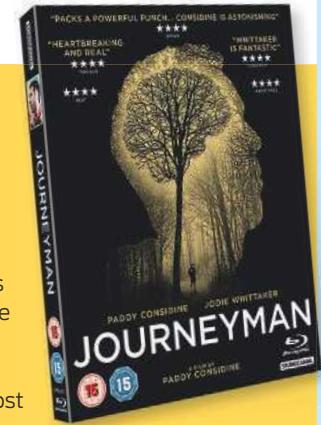
Universal around 3D are no more complex than 'Will it sell well?'. Furthermore, regional considerations are taken into account.

Universal's 3D Blu-ray boxset packing *Creature From the Black Lagoon* and *Revenge of the Creature* (see page 32) is getting a release in the US, but not in the UK. Presumably our market isn't deemed large enough to warrant another SKU.

Competition changes

As a long-standing subscriber to *HCC*, I enjoy the magazine and always enter the competitions.

In the last two issues, I've noticed you have changed the entry procedure from a



email-only entry, to one where you are obliged to register and login on the website. I think it would be a good idea to put a short comment to the readers who might not be aware of your changes.

Matt

Mark Craven replies: Thanks Matt.

Unfortunately we have had to change the entry procedure due to new GDPR data protection law. The advice from Mr HCC Lawyer was to move competition entry to our website. At present, this requires entrants to be 'logged on' to submit their answers.

Why no 4K Freeview?

Just rushing to finish last month's magazine, as the new one has arrived on the mat! They do seem to come around quickly.

Al, streaming, 8K [see *AV Avenger, HCC #287*] – it's all getting too much. The average consumer not subscribing to the likes of *HCC* can't have a clue. Like the salesmen in the shops, if you can find a shop, that is. Even watching the BBC News *Click* technology show used to be informative. Now it is mind-boggling and I work in technology.

Am I wanting an 8K screen anytime soon? Not especially! I would like a 4K one first, really. There is so much uncertainty with all the compatibility issues and features that are not standard on any particular model, that it is easier to continue to watch my brilliant Sony HD screen and hope it continues to function. It may not support iPlayer any more and ITV HD no longer works, but it is Android-free and does not talk to me – heaven forbid.

Interesting to see that a commercial company [Sharp] is starting to sell monitors into retail markets. A monitor is all I need a screen to be (I think).

My old faithful Humax Freesat recorder must be on borrowed time too. This leads me to the thrust of writing this email.

There has been no mention of how the BBC is progressing with introducing 4K transmissions across Freeview/Freesat in your pages for a long time – it's probably spending the money on Equality and Diversity instead. Do you have any insider information? Once upon a time the BBC message boards were useful for following such things, but they are gone now.

I would like to upgrade voluntarily before my equipment retires itself, but am not really motivated until I can receive some 4K sources. The standards are now agreed. What is the holdup?

Ian King

Mark Craven replies: We don't have any 'insider' info on BBC plans for 4K over Freeview or Freesat, and the corporation is always fairly open about its technological developments. The best place to get insight about what it is



'We may as well play cards while we wait for the Blu-ray'

up to is the BBC R&D website (www.bbc.co.uk/rd), where the current trend is discussing the lessons learned from its recent FIFA World Cup 2018 and Wimbledon 4K trials. From here, it's easy to get the impression the Beeb sees 4K as being an internet-delivered format.

You're right that standards are in place, although keeping track of where we are is a bit tricky. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) appears to be burning through recommendations for wide colour/HDR delivery quicker than I can get through my *Fast & Furious* boxset. We're currently up to ITU-R BT.2100-2, following the short-lived BT.2100-1 and BT.2100-0.

You say you want to receive some 4K sources, but what exactly are you looking for? Certainly, there's little in the way of free-to-air 4K content, but a combination of a Netflix subscription, pay-TV package (Sky Q, for instance) and an Ultra HD Blu-ray player can give you a solid diet of films, TV series, documentaries and (some) sports.

To make use of any of that, you will need a new TV. There are myriad 4K options now (and hardly any Full HD variants), so I'd suggest the time has come to look for a new model. You may even find that the iPlayer app works correctly, although it's perhaps preferable to out-source your VOD needs to a dedicated media streamer.

As for tuner-less monitors, including Sharp's 8K resolution LV-70X500E (which I'm somewhat surprised to discover is actually on sale at Selfridges), these are a sensible idea considering how much of our viewing is done through external sources, and how it removes the onus on the display manufacturer to remain on-the-ball with software updates etc. But when was the last time the AV industry actually pursued a sensible idea?

Fond memories of DVD

Like Anton van Beek [Film Fanatic, HCC #288] I've been a huge fan of DVD and still remember the day I upgraded from my VHS player and collection of bulky tapes to a DVD deck and the new, better-quality and easier to house shiny discs (I was never into Laserdisc, as that was a bit before my time).

I don't buy DVDs any more, but have kept hold of titles where we are still waiting for a Blu-ray release (or the Blu-ray doesn't offer the same quality of extras). One of these is James Cameron's brilliant *The Abyss*, which I know has been mentioned in *HCC* on numerous occasions. Another is the Kevin Costner film *Open Range* – one of my favourite Westerns. When will this see the light of day on Blu-ray? Michael Lange

Anton van Beek replies: *Open Range* is a weird one isn't it? Kevin Costner, Robert Duvall, a great flick with a solid reputation – and there hasn't been a Blu-ray release either in the UK or the US. It was released in cinemas in the US, in 2003, by Buena Vista (a subsidiary of Disney) and Universal here in the UK, so we're not sure who – or what – is to blame for the delay on both sides of the Atlantic.

However, the film was issued on BD in Germany and other European markets. These discs are Region B, so will play in your UK BD spinner. The German edition is still in print, and you can find it for around £13 ■

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Question:

Which award-winning, British-born actress stars in *A Quiet Place*?

Answer:

- A) Emily Mortimer
- B) Emily Blunt
- C) Emily Watson



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The Deer Hunter

Studiocanal is celebrating the 40th anniversary of Michael Cimino's epic masterpiece with a new 4K restoration that will be available to own

as a two-disc Blu-ray and a four-disc Collector's Edition from August 20. To mark the release we've got three *The Deer Hunter* two-disc BDs up for grabs!

Question:

Michael Cimino made his directorial debut with which Clint Eastwood film?

Answer:

- A) *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot*
- B) *Every Which Way But Loose*
- C) *Two Mules for Sister Sara*



The Changeling: Limited Edition

Regularly cited as one of the most chilling ghost stories ever committed to celluloid, *The Changeling* makes its UK Blu-ray debut on August 13.

Based on a 4K restoration, Second Sight's Limited Edition Blu-ray also packs in a host of newly created extras, plus a booklet, poster and the CD soundtrack – and we've got three copies to give away!

Question:

Who plays the lead role in *The Changeling*?

Answer:

- A) C. Thomas Howell
- B) George C. Scott
- C) CeCe Penniston



The Death of Superman

The Man of Steel faces his most formidable foe yet, the unstoppable Doomsday. Based on the legendary

comic book story, this action-packed animated film is out now on Blu-ray™, DVD and Digital Download, courtesy of Warner Bros. Home Entertainment – and to celebrate we have five Blu-rays™ to be won!

Question:

What is Superman's secret identity?

Answer:

- A) Clark Kent
- B) Bruce Wayne
- C) Dick Grayson

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Certified: AV-Holic!

HCC reader **Martin** says the transformation of his photo studio into a lush-looking movie and music den means he's finally happy after 25 years of dabbling with AV



Welcome to the AV-Holics Hall of Fame! Introduce yourself...

My name is Martin Hillary, 46, and I'm a self-employed wedding photographer just outside Selby in North Yorkshire.

How long have you been into home cinema?

Ever since my dad got his first surround sound system. It was a Jamo sub/sat Dolby Surround setup and it blew me away. It must have been going on 25 years ago. My next purchase then was a 32in widescreen CRT TV – that thing was heavy!

From that point on I was hooked, investing in Laserdisc and the huge cost of software – mainly from the States. I was then an early adopter of a Pioneer DV505 DVD player. I think I paid nearly £600 for it at the time.

I've owned all sorts of speaker systems and amps. My biggest regret is selling my Laserdiscs and player. I had the *Star Wars* NTSC Collector's Ed., which is now worth quite a bit!

What's in your AV setup now?

I use a 7.2-channel Yamaha RX-A1050 receiver for the amplification. I love the Yamaha sound and have owned several Yamaha AVRs in the past, but kind of regret not getting one that would drive more speakers as I have only two Atmos ceiling speakers.

My projector is an Epson EH-TW9300. This projects on to a home-made screen, but it has professional screen material that I purchased, tensioned and bent around a frame before mounting on the wall.

Main speakers are from the Tannoy DC6 range. I've owned Tannoy before and love the

sound. The ceiling speakers are made by PSB. The subwoofer, which is behind the sofa, is a BK Electronics XXLS400. It's certainly got enough 'oomph' for the room.

I then have a Sony UBP-X800 UHD player, which is now only used for the odd bit of streaming from Amazon and Netflix as I use an Oppo UDP-203 for playback of discs, plus a Bluesound Vault 2 for audio. This has a lovely, quality sound and I still purchase CDs and rip them using this.

Everything is controlled by a Harmony Ultimate remote – even the lighting which only comes on during music playback.

Whereabouts in your house is your home cinema?

Well there is a story. We moved into our current house for extra space and because



Fitting the drop ceiling was the trickiest part of the build, says Martin



I run my own photography business. The then garage (which had an upstairs too) made an ideal photography studio for portraits as well as consultations for weddings, so when we purchased the house we had it converted. Three years later I wasn't shooting portraits any more (I'm too busy with weddings) so there wasn't a need for studio lights and backdrops, etc. It was all the excuse I needed to move the home cinema kit from the living room into the portrait studio – after, of course, redecorating and putting in a new ceiling/fittings.

And I still use the room for wedding consultations!

Did you get any help from professionals when fitting out the cinema?

No, it's all been done by myself. It's been a learning process and I would do a few things differently if I was to do it again.



A Bluesound Vault 2 (left) rips CDs for network playback

The biggest work went into the ceiling as I wanted to drop it slightly to put the LEDs in. All the panels that have been put in are MDF, covered in a thick black felt material as I wanted to break up the black paint everywhere. As the floor is laminate I've put down a large high-pile black rug to help with sound reflections. I've put acoustic foam on the doors and although I didn't expect much of a difference they've actually helped to reduce sound reflections. I'm in the process of adding a few bits of artwork to the back and side wall.

What was the last thing you added to your system?

The Vault 2 but I'm always buying and selling and trying to improve things as finances allow.

Are you thinking of upgrading anything else?

I think for the first time in around 25 years I'm pretty happy with things and I think my 'hobby' has spent enough at the moment, although there are always discs arriving through the letter box, and I'd like to replace



The 2.40:1 projector screen is home-made

the blinds and curtains in the room with an electronic black-out blind that completely seals any gaps in the window.

The only way to stop light leak at the moment is to pull the blind down and the curtains across (which are blackout). The result is pretty good, though.

What's your favourite bit of kit and why?

The Epson EH-TW9300 projector. I'm still in awe when I see a 4K HDR image at 110 inches! The great thing about the 9300 is the lens memory function, which means I can zoom to a 2.40:1 ratio to fill the screen and have black side bars for 16:9. I couldn't decide which ratio to use for the screen when I first installed it but I prefer the wider aspect.

What movies discs do you use to show off your system?

At the moment *Paddington 2*. It's got a

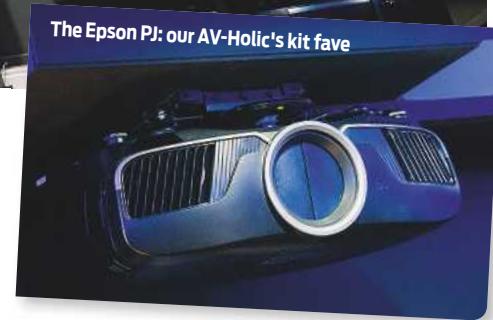
stunning picture and it's a wonderful family movie. *The Matrix* is still a firm favourite too, and although I'm not the biggest fan of *The Great Wall* it makes a good demo disc.

And what are your Top 5 favourite flicks?

2001: A Space Odyssey – I can't wait for the 4K release; *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*; *The Matrix*; *Somewhere In Time*, which is a great little time travel movie; and the wonderful *Silent Running*.

Do you stream movies/TV from Netflix, Amazon, Sky, etc?

I do occasionally but I'm not looking forward to the day when discs are no longer available. I'd sooner own the movie on disc and watch it from that. It's something tangible and it feels like you actually own something. I hate the fact everything is going more towards convenience than quality.



Does the cinema room get a lot of use?

About twice a week on average, although as it's at the end of the house I can shut the door and watch movies late at night without waking up the kids – so I do have the odd late-night bit of viewing.

And, lastly, what do your friends and family think of the cinema?

Everyone who comes in loves it. I've even had photography clients who insist on getting a demo! ■

Share your cinema system in the mag!

If you want to be in **HCC**, you'll need to send us some hi-res images of your cinema room. Here are a few tips...

1. Go big. Set your camera to take images at the largest possible size, and at the highest resolution. Don't worry about cropping or resizing – we will make them print-ready.
2. Get in focus. Make sure your photos are as sharp and clear as possible. If you have one, use a tripod, or place your camera on a flat, steady surface and take pictures on a delay. The sharper they are, the bigger we can print them.
3. Let some light in. While we tend to watch

movies in the dark, our cinema systems look their best when they are lit. If you can shoot with natural daylight, do so. If your room doesn't get a lot of light (a garage conversion, for instance) then switch on whatever lights are fitted. Avoid using flash wherever possible.

4. Be thorough. Send photos of as much of the room as possible. Images of both the front and back of the room, the kit rack, speakers, seating, disc shelf, movie poster art... The more the merrier.

5. Don't be shy. Send a picture of yourself!
6. Show us more. Got pictures of your room before it was a cinema? Or snaps of work being done? We love to see these, too.

Now what?

Email your images to letters@homecinemachoice.com with the subject heading 'AV-Holic', and provide your answers to the relevant questions above – then we'll be in touch!

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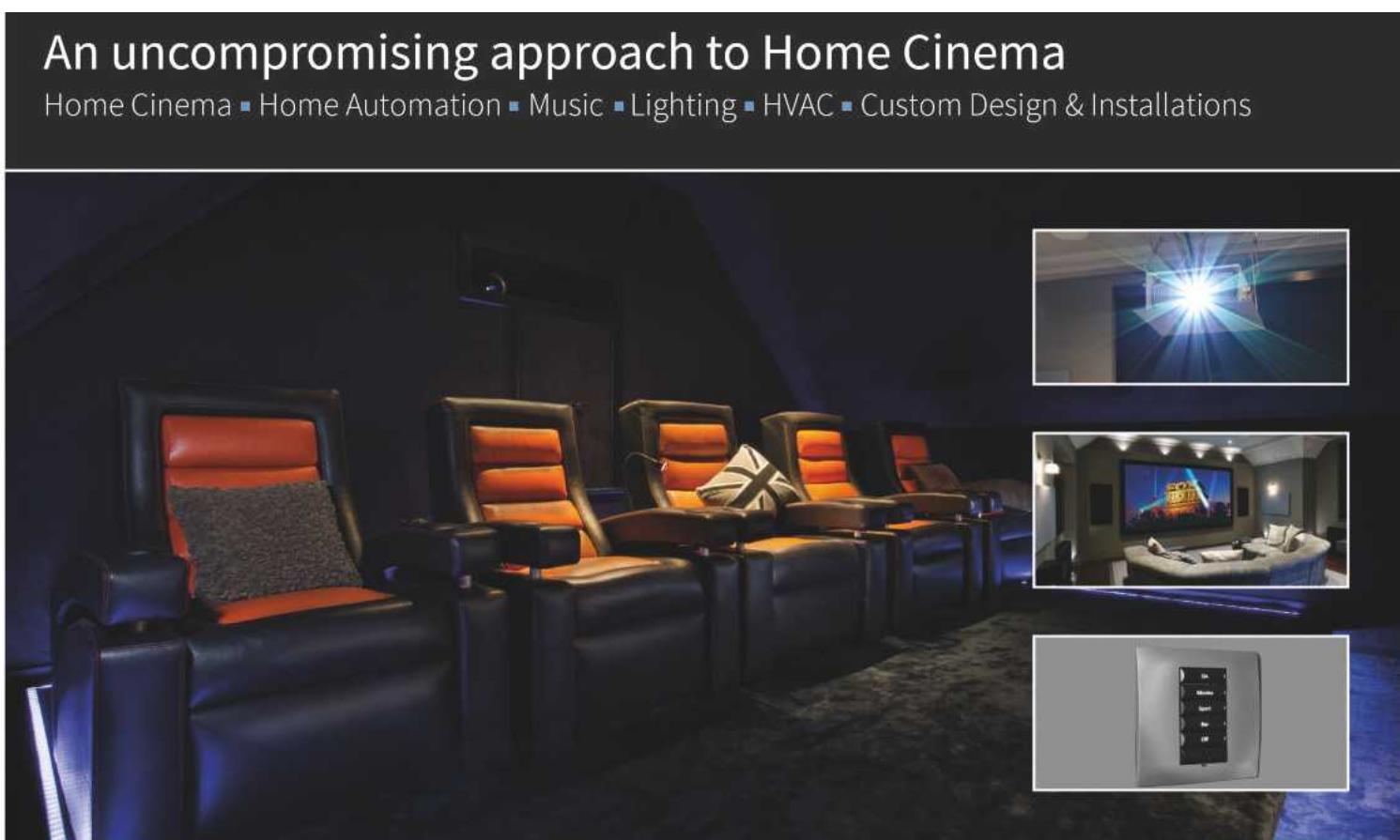


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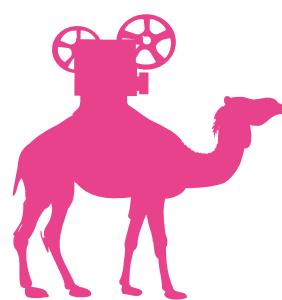


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PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **A QUIET PLACE** Make some noise for the silent horror hit's 4K debut **PETER RABBIT** CGI Potter revamp will drive you potty **GHOST STORIES** Supernatural anthology scares up plenty of nostalgia **DOCTOR WHO: SEASON 12** Tom Baker gets a hi-def makeover **GLOW: SEASON TWO** Ladies that punch on Netflix & MORE!

Cruising for success in 4K?

Mission: Impossible 1-5 Boxset → Paramount → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD



Paramount celebrates the cinema debut of the latest *Mission: Impossible* sequel by unleashing the first five films on Ultra HD Blu-ray. Head over to p94 to find out if buying the boxset is a mission 4K fans should be willing to take.

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★★
Acceptable	★★★★★
Disappointing	★★★★★
Dir	★★★★★

"I thought you said camping would be fun, Dad"



4K
ULTRA
HD

Silence is golden in Atmos

This acclaimed survival horror delivers plenty of unexpected AV thrills on Ultra HD Blu-ray



→ A QUIET PLACE

A Quiet Place is a finely-crafted horror film that, while ostensibly about a world terrorised by blind monsters that hunt with an over-developed sense of hearing, actually centres on a family dealing with tragedy.

John Krasinski (Jim from the US version of *The Office*) co-writes, directs and stars in this imaginative shocker with a small cast who are uniformly excellent in largely non-verbal roles. Krasinski's real-life wife Emily Blunt stands out as the pregnant and grieving mother, struggling to deal with an imminent birth and a world-wide apocalypse.

Krasinski marshals his limited resources to great effect, and aside from a rather obvious plot device, delivers a cleverly structured horror that provides plenty of tension and some big scares.

Picture: *A Quiet Place* was shot on 35mm film but finished at a resolution of 2K, so the image was upscaled for this Ultra HD release. The transfer is framed in the correct theatrical aspect ratio of 2.39:1 and graded in both HDR10 and Dolby Vision.

The resulting image has a lush film-like quality, with a thin layer of grain, excellent detail and vibrant colours that emphasise the golden Summer hues. Much of the film takes place in a rural setting; the transfer reveals all the details in the landscape, although the occasional shot appears slightly soft.

HDR adds greater realism to the highlights, as sunlight shines through the leaves or reflects off metal and water. The whites are bright and clean,

while the blacks are nice and deep, with plenty of information in the shadows. However, there is a touch of black crush, particularly in the nighttime scenes that take place in the cornfields.

While the difference isn't especially pronounced, Dolby Vision does add a bit more clarity to the darker scenes, and delivers the highlights with slightly greater precision, along with a more saturated image.

Audio: For a film about not making noise, *A Quiet Place*'s Dolby Atmos track is surprisingly powerful. The sound is all about dynamic range, with the mix often dominated by long periods of what seems like silence, but which is actually alive with subtle effects like rustling leaves, breathing or footsteps on sand.

The filmmakers fully utilise the object-based mix to deliver a three-dimensional soundscape where audio cues surround you in a highly directional manner. So you get a ticking clock that emanates from a specific point in the room; or effective use of the overhead channels as a monster moves around above while a character hides in a cellar.

When there is a loud noise or the alien beasties themselves arrive, the mix deliberately amps up the sound, giving the scene greater impact. A liberal use of LFE adds to the track's ability to make you jump out of your seat. Excellent work.

Extras: There are no extras at all on the 4K platter, but pop in the accompanying 1080p disc and you'll find three short but satisfying featurettes offering a general overview of the production (15 minutes), plus more detailed explorations of the film's sound design (12 minutes) and visual effects (eight minutes). **SW**

HCC VERDICT

A Quiet Place

→ Paramount → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £35

WE SAY: This clever little shocker hits UHD BD with lovely 4K visuals and exceptional object-based audio.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

GringoSTX/Sony Pictures → R2 DVD
£20

Not even the talented likes of David Oyelowo, Charlize Theron, Joel Edgerton, Amanda Seyfried, Thandie Newton and Sharlto Copley can rescue this messy and only fitfully funny black comedy about a pharmaceutical company employee (Oyelowo) who fakes his own kidnapping in Mexico to get revenge on his boss. Presumably due to poor box office, *Gringo* is skipping Blu-ray on these shores and, while quite bold and colourful, the DVD's anamorphic 2.40:1 transfer still looks flat compared to Universal's US Blu-ray encode. Four brief promo videos make for rubbish extras. **AvB**

**Lady Bird**Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£25

Writer-director Greta Gerwig draws on her own youth for this clever and witty account of a turbulent mother-daughter relationship, which finds Saoirse Ronan and Laurie Metcalf giving career-best performances. With its saturated colours and swirling digital grain, *Lady Bird*'s 1.85:1-framed Blu-ray encode cuts an impressive figure and is supported by a well-crafted DTS-HD MA 5.1 track that brings plenty of ambience to the film's settings. Extras are limited to an engaging commentary from Gerwig and cinematographer Sam Levy, and a 16-minute *Making of...* featurette. **AvB**

**The Death of Superman**Warner Bros. → All-region BD
£12

DC certainly does seem to love killing Superman. Including the 2007 *Superman: Doomsday* animation and the climax of *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, this is the third adaptation of the iconic superhero's fateful comic book brawl with Doomsday to hit the screen in a little over a decade. And while it may be the most satisfying, it still suffers from a villain lacking any real character, and the fact that it only tells half the story (you have to wait for next year's *Reign of the Supermen* for the conclusion). At least it looks and sounds pretty super on BD, and is supported by a very good *Making of...* featurette. **AvB**



James Corden rabbits on and on

Annoying update of the classic Beatrix Potter character will leave fans hopping mad

→ PETER RABBIT

When mean old Mr McGregor (Sam Neill) has a heart attack and dies, Peter Rabbit (James Corden) and his three sisters Flopsy (Margot Robbie), Mopsy (Elizabeth Debicki) and Cottontail (Daisy Ridley) think they've finally got the run of the vegetable garden. But the animals didn't reckon on McGregor's uptight, workaholic relative Thomas (Domhnall Gleeson), who turns up from London with plans of his own for the property.

Back in 1938, Beatrix Potter refused an offer from Walt Disney to turn her book *The Tales of Peter Rabbit* into an animated film. But no matter what Disney might have done to her beloved creation, it couldn't possibly be as bad as the film we ended up with 80 years later (for starters, we doubt very much it would have included a scene where Peter threatens to ram a carrot up somebody's backside).

Dispensing with pretty much everything that made Potter's book so memorable, Hollywood has transformed quaint little Peter into an annoying prat who spends his time cracking crude jokes and twerking. The decision to have the insufferable James Corden voice Peter only compounds the problem.

For all of that, the film isn't completely worthless. The handful of scenes where Peter actually shuts up and the focus turns to slapstick gags can be pretty funny, while a flashback done in the style of Potter's original illustrations provides a tantalising glimpse of what could have been.

Brash, noisy and utterly charmless, *Peter Rabbit* is the complete antithesis to the wonderfully inventive, funny and soulful *Paddington* films.



4K
ULTRA
HD



Rose Byrne is wasted in the thankless role of the bunny-loving neighbour

Picture: Based on an upconverted 2K Digital Intermediate, *Peter Rabbit*'s 4K encode isn't especially noteworthy. When it comes to detailing, the 2160p presentation offers a very modest uptick (primarily in medium shots and close-ups) over the already rather lovely 1080p incarnation. HDR grading has more of an impact, delivering a stronger sense of contrast and ramping up the standout colour elements.

Audio: The Ultra HD BD's exclusive Dolby Atmos mix builds nicely on the effective foundations laid by the Full HD platter's DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 soundtrack. Without drawing too much attention to themselves, the height channels are well integrated into the soundscape and bring an added sense of immersion to the playful sound design.

Extras: Pop the accompanying 1080p Blu-ray in your deck and you'll find a dance-along video, a short *Making of...* and a bonus animated short. **MC**

HCC VERDICT**Peter Rabbit**

→ Sony Pictures → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £35

WESAY: A fair, but not fantastic, 4K debut for this dismal animated update of a classic kids' story.

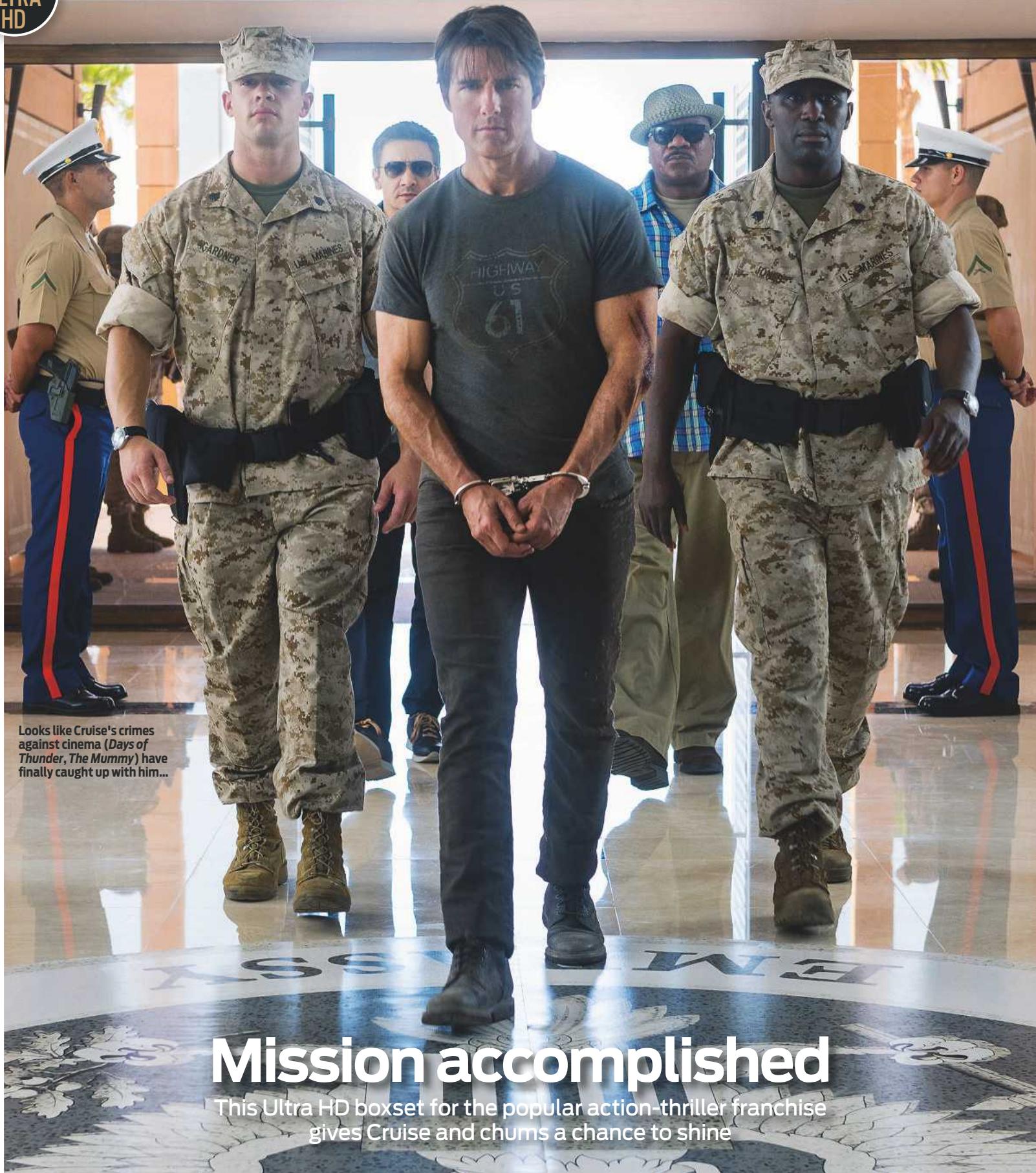
Movie:

Picture:

Audio:

Extras:

OVERALL:



Looks like Cruise's crimes against cinema (*Days of Thunder*, *The Mummy*) have finally caught up with him...

Mission accomplished

This Ultra HD boxset for the popular action-thriller franchise gives Cruise and chums a chance to shine



→ MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE 1-5 BOXSET

Aside from a misjudged second instalment that fortunately didn't derail the franchise, Tom Cruise's *Mission: Impossible* movies have consistently delivered enjoyably twisty plots and plenty of action thrills. So it's great to find them getting the 4K Blu-ray treatment courtesy of Paramount's back-catalogue department.

Picture: Image quality varies considerably throughout this series – as you'd expect, given that they were made across a couple of decades.

Mission: Impossible (1996) was graced with a particularly uninspiring transfer on Blu-ray that lacked any real sense of depth or refined detailing. Thankfully this Ultra HD incarnation is an entirely different kettle of fish. Scanned in 4K from original 35mm film elements, the image sports greatly improved textures and nicely expanded dynamic range – especially where black levels are concerned. Grain is pervasive, but gives the imagery a film-like appearance that was conspicuously absent from the Full HD presentation. Our only real issues regard slightly forced attempts to widen the colour gamut.

Native film grain is slightly less aggressive when it comes to *M:I-2* (2000) and while colours are still not perfect, they're less often overblown. Director John Woo's stylised photography provides even more opportunities to ramp up the dynamic range – although there is occasional ringing around heavily contrasted objects.

Perhaps because it was the first of the series to get a (2K) Digital Intermediate for its cinematic release, *Mission: Impossible III* (2006) shows a step-up in image clarity. There's less grain and more balanced and natural-looking colours, particularly regarding skin tones. The image contains a wider dynamic range too, notably in the scenes in the team's lab. Detail levels impress for an upscale of a 2K source, without only noticeable black crush in the very darkest scenes spoiling the party.

Picture quality leaps up again with *Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol* (2011). This one bagged a 4K DI for its cinematic run, with some scenes being shot in IMAX. The result is a significantly sharper, more detailed image than you get with the other discs, something that's clearly visible in everything from skin tones to distance shots across the film's various city locations. Dynamic range and colour gamut are extended without any of the crushed black level witnessed with the third film. In fact, the picture here verges on reference quality for much of its running time.

Unfortunately, *Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation* (2015) doesn't look as pristine as its immediate predecessor, and suffers from occasional picture noise. Although some sequences were filmed at 3.4K and even 6.5K, this movie was

only released digitally in cinemas at 2K, so the assumption is that it's been upscaled here.

In addition to the standard HDR10 incarnations, Paramount has also included Dolby Vision HDR on all five films. If you can watch the latter versions, you'll find grain looking a touch more refined on the first three titles, and colours feeling more balanced and natural across all five.

Audio: As difficult as it may be to believe, the first three *Mission: Impossible* movies have only ever been available with 'lossy' Dolby Digital 5.1 soundtracks on Blu-ray (which – sadly – remains the case with the Full HD discs bundled in this boxset). Paramount has taken the opportunity to rectify the issue by including Dolby TrueHD versions of those tracks on its 4K platters.

Sound quality generally improves as you move forward through the franchise – except that we'd argue the first film's 5.1 mix is more accomplished than that of the second movie. *Mission: Impossible*'s audio is a little unimaginative and short of ambient effects between action sequences, but overall is pretty compelling. *M:I-2*'s TrueHD 5.1 soundmix doesn't do a great job of combining its OTT action effects with director Woo's trademark 'bullet ballet' scoring, failing to generate the immersive atmosphere that you may have expected.

The third entry's 5.1 soundmix delivers a more dynamic, detailed and consistently busy surround soundstage.

...*Ghost Protocol* shifts to a 7.1-channel TrueHD track that opens up the soundstage beautifully compared with the previous trio. There's more extension in the LFE track too, and a larger sense of scale all-round.

The star of the audio show by far, however, is ...*Rogue Nation*. This is the only Dolby Atmos soundtrack in the boxset, and the difference is stark. Dynamics are huge, with monstrous (but never overcooked) levels of bass sharing ear space with colossal amounts of precise spatial detail and well-developed height ambience. The sequences at and after the opera are demo-grade.

Extras: While the *Mission: Impossible* 4K boxset finally does justice to the entire franchise with its AV performance, it fumbles the ball a little when it comes to bonus features.

The main problem is that the lion's share of the Blu-ray extras for the third and fourth movies appeared on bonus discs that Paramount hasn't seen fit to include in this UK boxset (although they are included with the individual 4K releases the studio put out in the US). You only get Full HD movie platters for each instalment and the extras included therein.

At least the decent directors' commentaries for the second and third films have been ported across onto their respective 4K platters, and the solid sets of behind-the-scenes featurettes for the first, second and fifth films can be found on their Blu-ray discs.

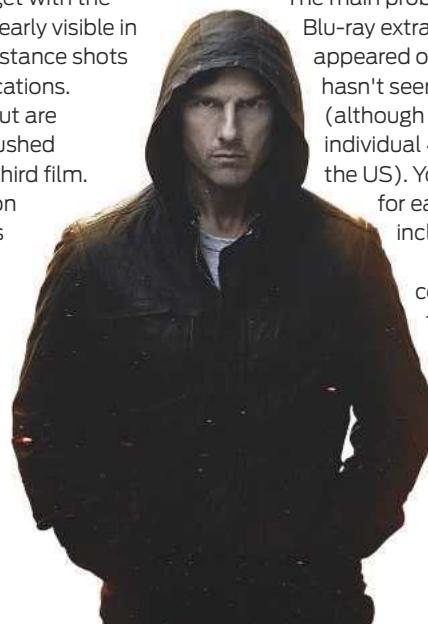
There are no new extras. JA



Brian De Palma and John Woo helmed the first two films in the series (above)...



...while J.J. Abrams and Brad Bird took the reins for the third and fourth



HCC VERDICT

Mission: Impossible 1-5 Boxset

→ Paramount → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £120

WESAY: Despite some missing extras, a boost in AV quality makes this 4K set an essential purchase.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★☆

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Arcade Action

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. **Rik Henderson** checks out a videogame vying for time on your home cinema system...



The game boasts a lineup of 275 vehicles!

The Crew 2

Ubisoft → PS4, Xbox One, Windows PC → £55

Multiplayer racing game *The Crew* was somewhat underrated on its release in 2014. Sure, its plot was mostly hokum and a few technical hitches sometimes got in the way, but the persistent open-world setting and madcap racing provided plenty of arcade driving fun.

That's likely why the latter features have survived the transition to its sequel, while the others have been ditched or improved. *The Crew 2* is, largely, plot-free and the benefit of time and technological advances have greatly boosted multiplayer online connectivity.



There is also an even bigger open area to play on, spanning the entire US landscape, plus the addition of new vehicle types. But for all its enhancements you can't help feel there's something missing. We can't quite put our finger on it, but the game lacks a little soul. Maybe a risible storyline is better than none after all?

That's not to say *The Crew 2* isn't fun. For starters, there are now planes to fly, boats to speed around in and you can occasionally switch between

them mid-race. It makes for excellent variety in play and asks for a wider player skill set than most racing games.

The real star, however, is the enormous playground you get to compete in. You can even choose to travel from one race location to another, taking in the scenery as you do. And we particularly like the way you can drive the entire map without obvious loading times.

In many ways, this feels like a multiplatform version of (Xbox One exclusive) *Forza Horizon*. But it's definitely not as rich an experience, especially where solo gamers are concerned. Nor can it compete with *Forza Horizon* on the visual side of things: the Xbox One X version does offer similar native 4K HDR 60fps action (the PS4 Pro drops the resolution down a touch), but *The Crew 2* just doesn't quite have the real-world pizzazz of its rival.

You will need a persistent online connection to play *The Crew 2* (it won't work offline), but the same can be said for many games these days. It is a multiplayer experience primarily and, as such, is worth a look for online racing fans. Just don't go expecting anything too deep from it.



Jack Reacher [4K]

Paramount → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £30



Tom Cruise isn't the Jack Reacher that readers of author Lee Child's bestselling thrillers pictured, but there's no denying that his unlikely casting paid off with this old-school

action thriller. Given the high quality of the original 1080p encode it's hardly surprising this 4K release doesn't feel like a game-changer, but the 2160p HDR visuals (also offered in Dolby Vision) showcase more fine detailing and richer blacks. The 4K disc carries over the Blu-ray's DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix and two chat-tracks. **MC**



Berlin Alexanderplatz: Limited Edition

Second Sight → Region B BD £80



If Second Sight's recent Blu-ray release of the epic German TV series *Heimat* has left you with a hankering for something similarly meaty to sink your teeth into, then you can't afford

to miss the label's latest boxset. Rainer Werner Fassbinder's extraordinary 15-hour TV adaptation of Alfred Döblin's novel is one of the acclaimed director's greatest achievements – and is now more suited to binge-watching than ever thanks to the fine 2K restoration that underpins this five-disc BD boxset. Among the extensive extras are a feature-length documentary about Fassbinder and an in-depth look at the restoration. **AvB**



Rollercoaster

101 Films Black Label → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £15



George Segal's safety inspector must stop a madman targeting theme parks in this entertaining 1977 disaster-thriller. This two-disc set offers up both the cut and uncut versions of the film

and while the differences between the two are actually pretty minimal, the audio mixes really do stand apart: the former features an LPCM 2.0 track, while the latter boasts a DTS-HD MA 2.1 mix that mostly succeeds in replicating the original 'Sensurround' presentation. Picture quality for both versions is excellent, and there are some interesting bonus goodies. **AvB**





A feast of old-school scares

This bigscreen adaptation of the hit stage production is a nostalgic treat for fright fans

→ GHOST STORIES

Professor Phillip Goodman (Andy Nyman) has devoted his life to debunking the supernatural. However, this deeply held scepticism is put to the test when he's contacted by a former paranormal investigator who challenges Phillip to look into three seemingly inexplicable hauntings...

Based on their successful stage play of the same name, Jeremy Dyson and Andy Nyman's *Ghost Stories* is an entertaining throwback to the Amicus horror anthologies of the '60s and '70s. And while this film's trio of ghost stories adhere to instantly recognisable genre tropes and don't do anything particularly revelatory, they still deliver the requisite spooky chills and, best of all, bring a sense of fun back to a genre that too often falls into the trap of being mean-spirited and nasty.

Dyson and Nyman's carefully constructed film also rewards repeated viewings, which will allow you to pick up on the 'clues' that are dotted throughout the tales. It also allows genre fans to spot the myriad homages and 'Easter Eggs' that the filmmakers have sprinkled throughout. These range from the blindingly obvious (a direct lift from Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead*) to the far more obscure (a visual nod to an old *Pan Book of Horror Stories* cover).

Add to this some excellent performances from Nyman, Paul Whitehouse, Alex Lawther and Martin Freeman, and the result is an enjoyably nostalgic cinematic ghost ride; one that will both send a shiver down your spine and put a smile on your face.

Picture: *Ghost Stories* arrives on Blu-ray with a technically impressive, if not overtly dynamic AVC 2.40:1 Full HD presentation. Given the nature of the subject matter and the overcast exterior locations, it's no surprise to see that the film's palette often heads to the gloomier end of the colour spectrum. That said, when called upon to handle bold primaries (as with the red of the electric fire in Chapter 4 and the door of Simon's house in Chapter 6), they look vivid and richly saturated.

Where the encode really excels though is as a black level torture test for your display. All three stories, but especially the one concerning a night watchman (Chapters 3 and 4), play out in extremely dark settings – yet there's still plenty of fine detail to be picked out in the shadows, providing your screen is up to the task.

Audio: As you'd expect, sound design plays a huge role in the film's ability to ramp up your feeling of unease and deliver some effective scares. Right from the off, where the production company logos are joined by the sound of water dripping around you, *Ghost Stories*' DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix delivers a masterclass in doing just that. From perfectly placed surround effects that move seamlessly around the soundstage to sudden, booming bass impacts, the track never falters when it comes to putting you at the heart of the onscreen events.

Extras: A fantastically informative commentary from Dyson and Nyman is joined by a *Making of...* featurette, a look at the recording of the score and a very funny Rorschach Test promo video. **AvB**



Tigon cat food (below) is one of many Easter Eggs for eagle-eyed horror fans



HCC VERDICT

Ghost Stories

→ Lionsgate
→ Region B BD → £25

WESAY: Spookily good AV ensures that these fun ghost stories are well worth repeated visits on Blu-ray.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★☆

OVERALL: ★★★★★



High-concept hipster horror

It's the end of the world as we know it and, thanks to this Blu-ray, I feel fine

→ THE ENDLESS: LIMITED EDITION

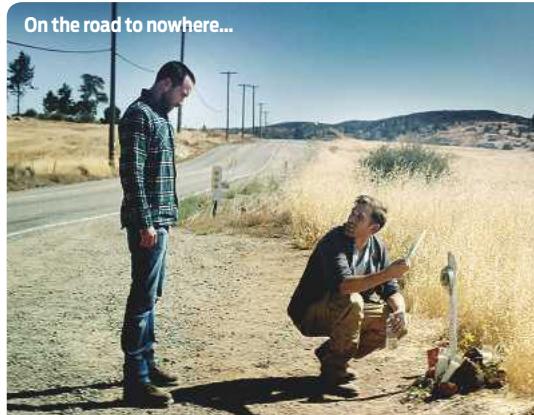
Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead's *The Endless* is a fascinatingly uneasy horror film that blends together end-of-the-world UFO death cults, quantum physics and Lovecraftian horrors.

Benson and Moorhead (who also co-directed, wrote, shot and edited the film) play brothers Justin and Aaron, who find themselves trapped in a spiral of dead-end jobs after fleeing Camp Arcadia, the commune they were raised at following the death of their mother. Prompted by a mysterious video message from the community, the duo decide to make a brief return to the Camp. But while Aaron remains nostalgic for his childhood, his older brother is determined to get to the bottom of what's really going on there.

Inventive and constantly surprising, *The Endless* is an assured piece of low-budget cinema that manages to take an extremely high-concept horror narrative and sell it primarily through excellent writing and performances.

To make things even more interesting for fans of Benson and Moorhead's previous films, *The Endless* shares a mythology with their 2012 reinvention of the 'cabin in the woods' fright flick *Resolution*, revisiting its setting and some of the characters, and building on the themes and ideas laid out there. And don't worry if you haven't already seen *Resolution*, as this Arrow Limited Edition Blu-ray includes a copy of that film, too.

Picture: Based on 'HD masters supplied by the filmmakers', *The Endless* and *Resolution* both receive



good-looking 2.40:1-framed 1080p encodes. Despite instances of stylised colour timing in the films, the overall impression you take away is one of very sharp yet natural-looking digital images, with healthy levels of fine detailing, robust palettes, accurate contrast and stable black levels.

Audio: Both titles deliver atmospheric DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtracks. Dialogue is cleanly prioritised in the front of the soundstage, while the surrounds provide plenty of subtle ambient cues. *The Endless*'s climax shows that the mixes are capable of handling more weighty, dynamic surround effects when needed, but by and large these are low-key affairs.

Extras: Each film gets a disc to itself, and each is also packed with bonus material including commentaries, interviews, VFX reels, deleted scenes, promo videos, outtakes and some fun extras (the dog from *Resolution* gets his own chat-track). It also comes bundled with an exclusive 32-page booklet. **AvB**

HCC VERDICT

The Endless: Limited Edition

→ Arrow Video → Region B BD
→ £25

WE SAY: Two sure-fire modern cult hits in one extremely satisfying Blu-ray package. Well worth a look.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Journeyman

Studiocanal → Region B BD

£23



Written and directed by leading man Paddy Considine, *Journeyman* tells the story of a boxer approaching the end of his career, who suffers a head injury during a fight and must attempt to piece his life back together. A beautifully acted, if fairly slight, character study, *Journeyman* never quite lands the knockout punch it's aiming for. That said, it still packs some pretty devastating emotional blows along the way – while also dazzling with fancy AV footwork in the form of meticulously detailed 2.40:1 visuals and atmospheric DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics. Considine's chat-track is the pick of the slim extras. **AvB**

A Very English Scandal

Sony Pictures → R2 DVD
£16



This BBC dramatisation of the Jeremy Thorpe scandal that rocked British politics in the 1970s is the sort of thing that would seem utterly unbelievable if not for the fact that it really happened. Written by Russell T. Davies and directed by Stephen Frears, this enthralling (and unexpectedly funny) three-part drama is only being given a DVD release in the UK – which is a bit of a missed opportunity given how good the episodes looked on their original HD broadcasts. Extras are limited to four short, but informative and fun, behind-the-scenes featurettes. **MC**

Plunkett & Maclean

101 Films → All-region BD

£20



The feature debut of director Jake (son of Ridley) Scott, there's a distinct whiff of Britpop to the style (if not the soundtrack) of this 1999 romp about two 18th Century highwaymen. But as fun as it is watching Robert Carlyle and Johnny Lee Miller robbing foppish toffs, the biggest crime you'll witness here is the theft of anything resembling film grain on this Blu-ray, with the off-the-shelf master that 101 Films has licensed suffering from an egregious application of noise-reduction. The disc's highly artificial, digital-looking imagery is partnered by a cacophonous, if spacious, LPCM 2.0 stereo mix. **AvB**

Dark Crimes

Signature Entertainment → R2 DVD

£15



If the idea of Jim Carrey playing a disgraced Polish cop investigating the links between a best-selling novel and a cold murder case sounds like a recipe for disaster to you, then you're not wrong. Despite piling on a few pounds and a grizzled beard, the former funny man feels out of place in this dour crime thriller – not that we think anybody else could have done much to salvage this glacially-paced slog of a movie. The desaturated colour palette appears to have caused problems for the barebones DVD's anamorphic transfer, which suffers from instances of artefacting, crush and posterisation. **AvB**



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A new era for Who at home?

Already got them all on DVD? Now you can start buying them again on Blu-ray!

→ DOCTOR WHO: THE COLLECTION – SEASON 12

Having some time ago exhausted the library of extant classic *Doctor Who* stories to release on DVD, BBC Worldwide has now got around to testing fan appetites for Blu-ray re-releases. Choosing the 1974-1975 season to kick things off makes a lot of sense – not only does it mark the ever-popular Tom Baker's first year in the lead role, it also boasts one of the show's most well-regarded stories.

The season begins with *Robot*, a rather atypical tale that feels more like a hold-over from the John Pertwee era than the start of something new. Still, Baker is on excellent form throughout and the design of the titular menace is charmingly clunky.

The icky *The Ark in Space* finds the Doctor, Sarah (Elisabeth Sladen) and Harry (Ian Marter) battling giant insects on a space station – and it's here that the new production team of Philip Hinchcliffe and Robert Holmes really start to set out their stall.

Lasting for just two episodes, the brisk and brutal *The Sontaran Experiment* provides viewers with a chance to catch their breath before launching into the season's biggest story. And it's always fun to see the potato-headed aliens return to the show.

Genesis of the Daleks is the high point of the season (and one for the series as a whole, too). Exploring the origins of the Daleks, the story finds a way to make the evil pepper pots scary again and with the arrival of Davros introduces one of *Doctor Who*'s most unforgettable villains.



New extras include a chat with Tom Baker and *Doctor Who*'s take on *Gogglebox*

Unfortunately, *Revenge of the Cybermen* fails to work the same magic for its bad guys, serving up a rather run-of-the-mill adventure that finds the metallic marauders attempting to destroy a 'planet of gold' that threatens their existence.

Picture: Considering its origins as a studio-based BBC TV series shot on video with some 16mm film inserts (typically model and location shoots), you really have to temper your expectations of what to expect from *Doctor Who*'s picture quality on Blu-ray.

These upscaled 1080i 1.33:1 transfers exhibit plenty of ghosting and chroma anomalies. However, some additional clean-up work and the improved encoding Blu-ray offers over DVD means that the episodes definitely look better than they did in standard-definition.

Audio: All five stories feature restored DTS-HD MA 2.0 mono soundtracks, while *The Ark in Space* and *Genesis of the Daleks* also receive DTS-HD MA 5.1 remixes. For the most part the audio quality is as good as you could hope for – although an error on the first episode of *The Sontaran Experiment* sees all audio relegated to the rear channels on surround setups. The good news, though, is that the BBC is working on replacement discs.

Extras: This set ports over the abundant extras from the old DVDs, and adds some new goodies including an hour-long interview with Tom Baker, *Gogglebox*-style featurettes for each story, the Christmas 1975 omnibus version of *Genesis of the Daleks*, and almost three hours of material from the 1992 tie-in video, *The Tom Baker Years*. **AvB**

HCC VERDICT

Doctor Who: The Collection – Season 12

- BBC Worldwide → All-region BD
- £50

WESAY: The definitive home release of these classic episodes – just don't expect too much in AV terms.

Movie: ★★★★☆

Picture: ★★★★☆

Audio: ★★★★☆

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★☆

King of HeartsEureka: The Masters of Cinema
Region B BD & R2 DVD → £18

This nutty WWII farce stars Alan Bates as a soldier sent to defuse a bomb left in a deserted French village, only to get caught up with the inmates of a local asylum who are now running wild in the streets – and proclaim him their 'King of Hearts.' Director Philippe de Broca's 1966 anti-war comedy comes to Blu-ray with an impressive 2.35:1-framed 1080p encode (based on a new 4K restoration from the original Techniscope negative), and crisp LPCM dual-mono soundtrack (mainly in French, but with some English dialogue, too). Extras are a chat-track, three interviews and a trailer. **MC**

**Black Peter**Second Run → All-region BD
£20

The debut dramatic feature of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* director Milos Forman, this 1964 film follows disaffected teen Peter as he struggles with a new job and pursues local girl Pavla. Mixing documentary realism with a smart sense of humour, *Black Peter* frequently resembles a Czech version of a Ken Loach movie – which is no bad thing. Sourced from a new 4K restoration, the film's 1.37:1 Full HD encode is excellent, and is joined by a similarly cleaned-up LPCM dual-mono soundtrack. Pick of the disc's extras is a fascinating, fact-packed commentary by film historian Michael Brooke. **AvB**

**The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey**Arrow Video → Region B BD
£25

A group of medieval villagers seeking to escape the Black Death tunnel into modern day New Zealand in Vincent Ward's enjoyably offbeat 1989 fantasy. Based on a restoration undertaken by the New Zealand Film Commission from 'original film elements', *The Navigator...* comes to Blu-ray with an organic-looking Full HD encode that reveals a wealth of both detail and grain in its 1.85:1 frame. Meanwhile, the film's inventive stereo sound design is well represented by the disc's LPCM 2.0 mix. Extras include a 1989 TV documentary about Ward. **AvB**

**Wonderstruck**Studiocanal → Region B BD
£23

This magical drama tells the parallel tales of two deaf children – Ben (Oakes Fegley), a young boy trying to track down his absent father in 1977 New York; and Rose (*A Quiet Place*'s Millicent Simmonds), who arrives in the same city in 1927 looking for her silent movie star mother. This incredibly affecting film is well-served on BD by a pristine 2.40:1 1080p encode that is equally at home with the colour ('70s) and black-and-white ('20s) sections the film weaves between. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is more atmospheric than dynamic, but gets the best out of Carter Burwell's score. **MC**



Sharp-shooting set hits its target

Arrow's introduction to the wild world of Sartana is a lot of fun for fans and newcomers alike

→ THE COMPLETE SARTANA

When Sergio Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) cleaned up at the box office, the Italian film industry did what it did best back then – it got busy churning out an endless run of cash-ins and imitators. By far the best known of the Man With No Name wannabes was Django, but many, many others followed in his wake; one of the most popular being Sartana.

Played by actor Gianni Garko in all but one of his 'official' films (as with Django his name also appeared in the titles of many 'unofficial' cash-ins), Sartana is a sharp-shooting man of mystery with a fondness for gambling. He always dresses in black and uses seemingly impossible tricks to outfox his enemies.

Arrow's boxset brings together all five official films in the series: *If You Meet Sartana... Pray for Your Death; I am Sartana, Your Angel of Death; Sartana's Here... Trade Your Pistol for a Coffin; Have a Good Funeral My Friend... Sartana Will Pay; and Light the Fuse... Sartana is Coming*. Thankfully, the films are every bit as over-the-top and deliriously nutty as their titles, ensuring that Spaghetti Western freaks will find plenty here to enjoy.

Picture: All of the films are framed at 2.35:1 except for the first, which was shot at 1.85:1. This is also the only title not to have been restored from a 2K scan of the original 35mm negatives. With all other elements presumably missing, Arrow has had to resort to a 2K scan of a 35mm print instead.

The differences in quality when it comes to this particular AVC 1080p encode is striking. While *If You Meet Sartana...* is perfectly watchable, it's noticeably



rougher than the others and exhibits a fair amount of print damage.

The rest of the movies fare better, looking bright, colourful and packing plenty of finely-wrought textures. Dirt and damage are practically nonexistent on these titles, too.

Audio: All five films come with DTS-HD MA mono versions of their Italian and English language tracks. As usual with Italian films of this vintage, dialogue was recorded post-sync, so neither version matches the footage perfectly – although there are a few curious differences (the funniest being the extremely camp voice given to Klaus Kinski's character on the English track for the second flick).

Extras: Disc-based extras include interviews, stills/poster galleries and commentaries from enthusiastic film historians on the first, second and fourth films. An illustrated booklet houses an essay about the Sartana films and a Spaghetti Western timeline. **AvB** >

HCC VERDICT***The Complete Sartana***→ Arrow Video → All-region BD
→ £70

WESAY: Despite a few minor issues, this boxset is a terrific introduction to a Spaghetti Western icon.

Movie:

Picture:

Audio:

Extras:

OVERALL:



Val Guest's *Yesterday's Enemy* ranks among Hammer's best films



Going Hammer and Tongs...

The only monsters are human in this collection of some of the studio's most controversial movies

→ HAMMER: VOLUME THREE – BLOOD & TERROR

As with Indicator's second Hammer boxset (*Criminal Intent*), this third volume continues to steer clear of the Gothic horror the studio is best known for, in favour of shining a light on some of its experiments with other avenues of cinema.

Director Val Guest's *The Camp on Blood Island* (1958) plays out like a sadistic version of *The Bridge on the River Kwai* with its tale of British P.O.W.s attempting to escape from a Japanese prison camp during World War II. Uncompromising and brutal, it's a tough watch and was greeted with a barrage of criticism on its original release for its depiction of 'the enemy' – not that this stopped it from being a huge hit at the UK box office.

Based on a 1958 BBC drama, *Yesterday's Enemy* (1959) is seen by many as Hammer's attempt to answer ...*Blood Island*'s critics, with Val Guest returning to helm a story focusing on a war crime committed by British soldiers. Whether you buy that or not, there's no denying that *Yesterday's Enemy* is a remarkably powerful film that stands among the studio's very best efforts.

Terence Fisher's *The Stranglers of Bombay* (1959) is a prime piece of Colonial-era pulp dealing with a British officer in India coming up against the same Kali-worshipping Thugee cult that would later pop up in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. Packed with severed hands and gouged-out eyes, this is a gloriously violent piece of exploitation cinema



(witness the 'presented in Strangoscope' credit that adorned some posters) whose biggest stumbling block when judged today is the use of Caucasian actors in 'brownface' to play Indian roles.

Hammer icon Christopher Lee makes his presence felt, albeit made up as the villainous Chinese gang leader Chung King, in *The Terror of the Tongs* (1961). Pure 'Yellow Peril' pulp, this fairly dull effort is not one of the studio's finest and many of the 'yellowface' performances rank alongside Mickey Rooney's notorious turn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* when it comes to cultural sensitivity.

Picture: The first three films are presented in black-and-white in their original 2.35:1 aspect ratios, while the final film is a colour production framed at 1.66:1. As with Indicator's previous Hammer sets, the actual Blu-ray image quality is uniformly excellent, perfectly capturing the subtle greyscale tonalities and the distinctive Eastman Color appearance. Frames are filled with textural detail.

Audio: The mono soundtracks for each film have also been restored and are presented here in lossless LPCM or DTS-HD MA guises. The quality is very good, although the limitations of the source materials (such as some very hollow-sounding Foley effects in *Yesterday's Enemy*) have an impact at times.

Extras: A multitude of excellent extras includes chat-tracks on three of the films (*Yesterday's Enemy* gets an NFT audio interview with Val Guest instead); retrospective *Making of...* featurettes; interviews; actor profiles; video essays; three different cuts of *The Stranglers of Bombay*; and so much more. **AvB**

HCC VERDICT

Hammer: Volume Three – Blood & Terror

- Indicator → All-region BD
- £43

WESAY: Another essential addition to Indicator's fantastic series of Hammer Blu-ray boxsets.

Movie: ★★★★☆

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★☆

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Cannibal FeroxShameless → Region B BD
£15

Once promoted as being 'banned in 31 countries', Umberto Lenzi's notorious 1981 Italian exploitation flick has finally made its way onto Blu-ray in the UK. Despite being shorn of its scenes of real-life animal mutilation, *Cannibal Ferox* remains an especially nasty addition to an already disreputable sub-genre. *Shameless*'s new 2K remaster retains the native 16mm film grain, but suffers from a heavy yellow cast to the AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode's colour palette. Extras include a restoration demo and candid interviews with Lenzi and actor Giovanni Lombardo Radice. **AvB**

**Doom Asylum**Arrow Video → Region B BD
£25

Primarily notable for featuring a young Kristin Davis (*Sex and the City*'s Charlotte) walking around in a one-piece bathing suit for a big chunk of its running time, this 1987 slasher finds five teenagers running afoul of a disfigured psycho (and a terrible all-girl punk band) at an abandoned asylum. While *Doom Asylum* is nobody's idea of a 'good' film, there's enough gore and goofy humour on display to keep horror junkies watching. Arrow's striking new 2K restoration is backed up on Blu-ray by new and archival interviews, plus two audio commentaries. **AvB**

**Firestarter**

Plan B Entertainment → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £23



Your appreciation of this 1984 Stephen King adaptation will no doubt rest on how much you enjoy watching a tween Drew Barrymore stand around with her hair blowing in the wind as things explode into flames around her. If you're like us, and enjoyed all of *Firestarter*'s silliness, then you'll get a kick out of this UK Blu-ray. Not only does it appear to be based on the same (excellent) AVC 2.35:1 HD master as Shout! Factory's earlier US release, it also ports over the commentary, hour-long *Making of...* and interviews, and adds an exclusive chat-track by 'horror writer and anthologist' Johnny Mains. **AvB**



Medieval morality takes a battering

The uncut version of Paul Verhoeven's English-language debut more than lives up to its title

→ FLESH + BLOOD

'The three elements that are dominant, I think, anywhere on Earth are sex, are violence, are religion.' So states Paul Verhoeven in a career retrospective documentary included on this Blu-ray – and you certainly can't dispute that the Dutch filmmaker fully engages with all three of those topics in this violent 1985 medieval adventure that marked his English-language filmmaking debut (and which memorably left Michael Parkinson ranting about how he walked out of a screening of 'this vicious, dangerous trash' after just 40 minutes, when filling in for Barry Norman on an episode of the BBC's review show *Film '86*).

Presented here uncut for the first time in the UK, the film stars Rutger Hauer as Martin, the leader of a gang of medieval mercenaries whose attempt to get revenge on a nobleman that betrayed them results in the unplanned kidnapping of his prospective daughter-in-law Agnes (Jennifer Jason Leigh).

Behind all of the filth, despair, savagery and disease, *Flesh + Blood* is something approaching a love story. But this being a Paul Verhoeven picture, any thoughts of traditional romance are drowned out by scenes of graphic sex and violence (often mixed together), and the cynical and morally ambiguous cast of characters (none more so than Agnes...).

Picture: *Flesh + Blood*'s 2.40:1 Full HD encode holds up reasonably well, but there's clearly some room for improvement. On the positive side of things, colours look fairly good and there's a fair amount of detail in the majority of shots. On the flip side, there's



On your marks,
get set, go...



evidence of digital sharpening (thankfully nothing too aggressive) on the HD master, while instances of poorly resolved film grain leave darker scenes swarming with great big clumps of the stuff to the point where shadow detail is almost completely lost.

Audio: The Blu-ray's LPCM 2.0 stereo soundtrack doesn't feel especially wide, although the rolling thunder in Chapters 8 and 9 demonstrates clear channel separation. Basil Poledouris' heroic score is perhaps the biggest beneficiary of the extra heft provided by the lossless presentation.

Extras: The director's commentary does a great job of addressing the film's many production problems (unhappy actors, financing issues, *et al*), while the 2016 doc *Verhoeven versus Verhoeven* explores the filmmaker's career. Also included are interviews with Verhoeven, Poledouris, Hauer (audio-only) and screenwriter Gerard Soeteman, plus a trailer. **AvB**

HCC VERDICT**Flesh + Blood**

→ Eureka → Region B BD & R2 DVD
→ £18

WESAY: More Verhoeven on Blu-ray in the UK is always welcome – even if the film isn't one of his best.

Movie:

Picture:

Audio:

Extras:

OVERALL:

Wrestling dramedy pulls no punches

This second season will put you in a heart-lock as the grappling girls finally take to the air

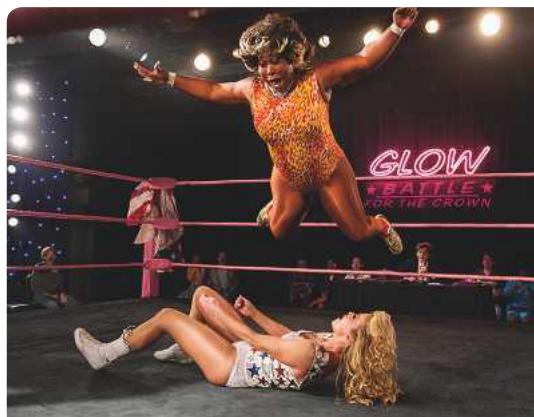
→ GLOW: SEASON TWO

Ostensibly the true story of a scrappy women's wrestling federation that aired on US TV in the 1980s (for more on this look to the 2012 documentary *The Story of the Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling*, also on Netflix), *GLOW* is a fast-moving dramedy now into its second season. The action may centre around a ring, but the blows it lands are emotional.

The second season opens with our troupe ready to go on-air. Storylines and characters are sorted, but the real battles are off-camera. Liberty Bell, aka Debbie (Betty Gilpin) is struggling to come to terms with her separation from her husband and child, while Soviet Spy (not really) Zoya The Destroyer, aka Ruth (Alison Brie) takes it upon herself to shoot a goofy show intro with cameraman Russell (played by filmmaker Victor Quiñaz), that ruffles the feathers of insecure, chauvinist director Sam (an endearingly sleazy turn by Marc Maron).

It quickly becomes clear that *GLOW* isn't a show about wrestling at all. Series creators Liz Flahive and Carly Mensch (who sharpened their claws on Netflix stablemate *Orange is the New Black*) are actually telling a story about American TV in the '80s, and the women that worked in it. *GLOW* also orbits the world of grindhouse cinema. Sam's often-ridiculed, but clearly seminal, oeuvre of low-budget horror movies indicates the cantankerous director warrants far more respect than he ever gets.

As a Netflix original, don't expect *GLOW* on disc anytime soon. If you want to see it, dip your toes in the stream...



Picture: *GLOW* has an authentic gritty, grainy aesthetic. Presented in Dolby Vision on compatible screens, 4K HDR on others, it's not overtly flashy. The extra detail afforded by 4K makes big close-ups pop – helpful as a good deal of story is told through the cast's faces – but the HDR element is largely inconsequential. Strip lights and headlights have intensity, but the overall picture balance is level.

Audio: The 5.1 soundmix is biased to the front, for a wide stereo spread, although crowd noises benefit from surround channel atmosphere. The soundstage tangibly opens up when the cast are floppin' and boppin' in the ring.

One of the joys of *GLOW* is the sense of period it evokes, both in production design and character. And much like fellow Netflix hit *Stranger Things*, it uses '80s music to locate the drama, and this is generally played out party-mode style. Not a system stretcher then, but in terms of design it's a clean pinfall. **SM**

HCC VERDICT

GLOW: Season Two

→ Netflix Original

WE SAY: Netflix's wrestling series makes all the right moves with its storytelling and AV presentation.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



→ LUKE CAGE: SEASON TWO

→ Netflix Original

Erstwhile Defender and Hero for Hire Luke Cage (Mike Colter) is back. Picking up some time after the conclusion of the first season, Cage is doing good around the Hood, from his base in Pop's Barber Shop. It's hardly the Bat Cave, but at least he can keep his pate shaved.

The big bad this time around is Bushmaster (Mustafa Shakir), a Jamaican gangster with similarly resistant skin to the show's street-level superhero. He's not quite as impervious, but compensates with a seriously mean attitude. The rest of the cast reappear seamlessly from the first arc, including Alfre Woodard (gang boss Mariah Dillard) and Theo Rossi (as 'Shades' Alvarez), who almost steal the show out from under its title character.

The strength of *Luke Cage* remains its action sequences, which are well staged, exciting and often surprisingly brutal. The casting is also consistently strong. If you've become embroiled in the Marvel

Fellow superhero Danny Rand (aka Iron Fist) pops by to give Luke a hand

Netflix universe then it's well worth a watch. However, the pacing remains stuttery; if you don't commit to a binge it's relatively easy to become disconnected. Once again, it looks like 13 episodes is just too long for some of Netflix's Marvel shows.

Luke Cage is presented in 4K Dolby Vision/HDR10. It doesn't squander in this regard, and is often quite beautiful to look at, with detail (it's lensed on RED digital cameras) and colour in abundance. The second episode features outstanding work by director of photography Petr Hlinomaz and colourist Tony D'Amore.

The 5.1 soundmix is consistently entertaining, particularly when it comes to the many shootouts. There are literally bullets flying from every corner. Music is also a key pleasure this time around, with subwoofers offered gainful employment through the judicious use of reggae. **SM**



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Collecting...

After the apocalypse

Having just about survived *A Quiet Place* unscathed, **Team HCC** heads out into the home cinema wastelands to check out 10 more bigscreen visions of humanity's post-apocalyptic struggles...

CHERRY 2000

By their very nature, most post-apocalyptic dramas tend to be pretty downbeat affairs. Director Steve De Jarnatt's 1985 (but shelved until 1987) *Cherry 2000* bucks this trend by playing up the satirical social commentary inherent in its story of one man's journey into the post-apocalyptic wilderness of 2017(!) to find a replacement for his knackered 'sex-bot'. While unlikely to top any 'best of...' lists, *Cherry 2000* is an enjoyably odd genre mash-up with a fun sense of humour and surprisingly good action beats (Melanie Griffiths kicks serious butt). And it's all set to a terrific score by Basil Poledouris.

Get it: Signal One's UK Blu-ray can be picked up these days for around a tenner. It backs up its colourful 1080p encode with a chat-track, plus an interview with actor Tim Thomerson.



TERMINATOR: SALVATION

The war between man and machine had been teased in the three previous *Terminator* movies; this 2009 sequel directed by McG moved the action forward to a post-Judgement Day world featuring old chums John Connor and Kyle Reese. Some franchise fans hate it, but we have a *Salvation* soft spot...

Get it: Whether you buy Sony Pictures' regular, steelbook or T-600 Skull edition Blu-ray, all feature the Theatrical and Director's Cuts.

WATERWORLD

Dogged by bad press about cost overruns and production issues, Kevin Costner's 1995 epic may come off as a soggy version of *Mad Max*, but is kept afloat by its stunning production design and exciting action scenes.

Get it: To date Universal has only released the theatrical cut on Blu-ray with just a trailer and D-Box functionality in the way of extras. A 40-minute longer Extended Cut was released on two-disc DVD back in 2008.

LAND OF THE DEAD

George A. Romero made a return to his zombiverse in 2005, cramming human survivors into a sanctuary city surrounded by undead foes that are getting smarter and smarter. A sizable budget, and cast including Dennis Hopper and John Leguizamo, are put to great use, and – as usual – the blood and guts are married to some wicked satire.



Get it: The 2008 Director's Cut UK Blu-ray is packed with extras including a Romero commentary.

THE ROAD

This 2009 adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's 2006 novel digs out some desolate locations to help paint its picture of a barely populated future US, and examines the lengths that an unnamed man (Viggo Mortensen) will go to to keep his young son (Kodi Smit-McPhee) alive. Hardly the happiest film around, but grimly fascinating.

Get it: Just a single dip so far for this well-regarded drama. Icon Home Entertainment's UK BD proffers a decent 1080p image, DTS-HD 5.1 audio and a chat track.

TOP
PICK

THE BOOK OF ELI

An in-form Denzel Washington shows off some impressive fight skills as he journeys across the sun-baked US – where an unspecified apocalyptic event has reduced civilisation to ruins – in this superior 2010 thriller/neo-Western. Screenwriter Garry Whitta unfolds the backstory slowly, and pens some excellent set-pieces as he works towards the big reveal. Worth watching at least twice...

Get it: *The Book of Eli*'s inventive surround mix is given pristine treatment on Blu-ray via a DTS-HD 5.1 track. Image quality on EiV's platter is equally solid.



NAUSICÄÄ OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND

Hayao Miyazaki's ecologically minded 1984 hit is notable as the film that gave rise to Studio Ghibli and for being a precursor to his 1997 animated masterpiece *Princess Mononoke*. It sees a young princess trying to find a way for humanity to co-exist with the uncontrollable forces of nature that have emerged in the wake of an apocalyptic war fought thousands of years earlier.

Get it: Studiocanal's UK Blu-ray bolsters its fine AV performance with some worthwhile extras.



PLANET OF THE APES

Director Franklin J. Schaffner's wonderful 1968 sci-fi allegory stars Charlton Heston as a cynical astronaut who crash-lands on a world where talking apes are the dominant species. Just don't get it confused with Tim Burton's dreadful 2001 remake.

Get it: Fox has issued pretty much the same, feature-packed Blu-ray in every territory – although only the Region A-locked US platter includes the film's original mono soundtrack (albeit in 'lossy' Dolby Digital dual-mono form) alongside the remixed DTS-HD MA 5.1 version.



ROBOT JOX

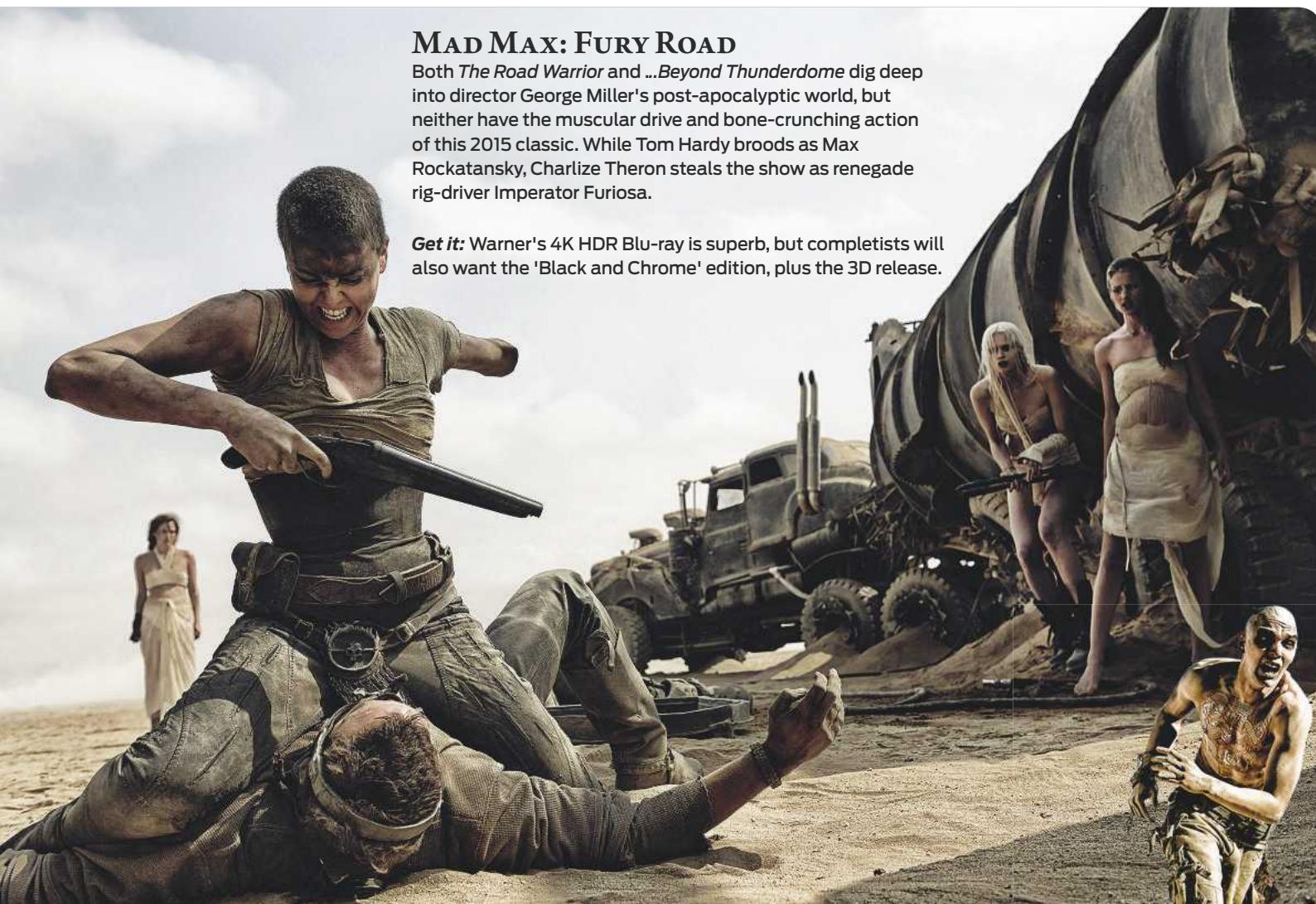
Long before *Pacific Rim* there was this fun 1990 flick from director Stuart 'Re-Animator' Gordon, which sees territorial disputes in a post-apocalyptic future being settled through gladiatorial combat between soldiers piloting giant robots. Boasting designs by Ron Cobb and some excellent stop-motion effects, *Robot Jox* is a must-see for mecha-maniacs.

Get it: While there's no sign of a UK Blu-ray, Shout! Factory put out a Region A-locked disc in the US in 2015. As well as decent 1080p visuals and DTS-HD MA 2.0 sonics, it offers up two chat-tracks and other goodies.

MAD MAX: FURY ROAD

Both *The Road Warrior* and *...Beyond Thunderdome* dig deep into director George Miller's post-apocalyptic world, but neither have the muscular drive and bone-crunching action of this 2015 classic. While Tom Hardy broods as Max Rockatansky, Charlize Theron steals the show as renegade rig-driver Imperator Furiosa.

Get it: Warner's 4K HDR Blu-ray is superb, but completists will also want the 'Black and Chrome' edition, plus the 3D release.



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HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★★
Acceptable	★★★★★
Disappointing	★★★★★
Dire	★★★★★

TOP 15 Televisions

01

Samsung QE65Q9FN → £3,800 ★★★★★

Revised QLED technology and the implementation of a local dimming backlight reap astonishing picture quality rewards with this bright, colourful 4K HDR hero. Great usability and smart platform, too. *HCC #285*



TOP 5 Blu-ray movies

**Pacific Rim: Uprising**

There's little originality in this mechs vs kaiju sequel, but it certainly delivers the goods when it comes to eye-opening set-pieces and heavyweight cinema sound. The best of the extras is a chat track. *HCC #288*

**Star Wars: The Last Jedi [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**

Rian Johnson delivers another slice of sci-fi spectacular that sees the franchise move in an unexpected new direction. The 4K platter marries Dolby Atmos with Dolby Vision. *HCC #285*

**The Greatest Showman [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**

Roll up! Roll up! Hugh Jackman leads the cast of this rousing musical based on the life of circus master P.T. Barnum. Superb AV presentation and fun extras. *HCC #286*

**Blade of the Immortal**

The latest film from prolific Japanese director Miike Takashi is a riveting Samurai actioner bookended by audacious fight scenes. Arrow's BD offers solid AV quality and a real wealth of bonus bits. *HCC #285*

**The Commuter**

Another team up between Liam Neeson and director Jaume Collet-Serra, another Hitchcockian slice of B-movie entertainment. This looks and sounds good on BD, but the extras are pitiful. *HCC #286*




02 LG OLED65E8 → £4,300 ★★★★★

This Dolby Vision-enabled OLED boosts image quality on last year's E7 (it's brighter, for one thing), although its Atmos sonics are a tad less impressive. Tidy design and excellent UI. *HCC #287*


03 Sony KD-65ZD9 → £3,000 ★★★★★

Full-array LED TV (with advanced local dimming tech) that claims a 1,800-nit peak brightness and DV support. Cinematic, sublime pictures – the 100in version [HCC #282] is even more impressive. *HCC #267*


04 Samsung QE55Q9F → £2,800 ★★★★★

Save a chunk of money by shopping for Samsung's flagship QLED TV at 55in size. Again, the 4K HDR performance here is superb, with efficient light control, excellent native brightness and rich, wide colour. *HCC #286*


05 Sony KD-65AF8 → £3,300 ★★★★★

Sony revises its OLED line with a new model offering a more conventional design than last year's A1. Acoustic Surface speaker technology and 4K visuals impress. Decodes Dolby Atmos bitstreams. *HCC #288*


06 Panasonic TX-55EZ952 → £2,000 ★★★★★

A 55in OLED TV with an effortlessly naturalistic performance, although not as bright as some rivals. Gorgeous, understated design and premium build quality. *HCC #277*


07 Sony KD-55XF9005 → £1,700 ★★★★★

Impressive backlighting, dynamic HDR images and top-quality motion processing are the major draws of this mid-tier Bravia. Android OS still needs improvement, though. *HCC #285*


08 Samsung UE49MU7000 → £750 ★★★★★

Not one of Samsung's top-flight TVs, but a cracking mid-range 49in model that presents 4K and HD material with bright, rich colours and stable blacks. Good choice for an affordable setup. *HCC #277*


09 Philips 55PUS6753 → £700 ★★★★★

Solid budget 4K option employing direct LED lighting and offering plenty of picture tweaks. A low native brightness limits HDR impact, but Ambilight adds to the all-round appeal. *HCC #288*


10 Panasonic TX-65EX750 → £1,500 ★★★★★

A (surprise!) 3D-capable LED screen that offers well-controlled backlighting, pleasing 4K clarity and good HD upscaling. Not the brightest around, and some colour inconsistencies. *HCC #279*


11 Loewe Bild 3.55 → £2,800 ★★★★★

Loewe's entry-level 55in OLED TV offers an artful fusion of design and performance (with decent sonics). Not the best selection of integrated smarts, though, and some rivals are cheaper. *HCC #283*


12 LG 55SJ850V → £900 ★★★★★

Backlight distractions hinder this set's performance in low-lit rooms, but it's a strong all-rounder, offering Dolby Vision HDR, WebOS smarts, well-rounded sonics and a bargain price tag. *HCC #276*


13 Hisense 55U7A → £800 ★★★★★

FIFA-branded 4K HDR flatscreen that makes up for a lack of HDR brightness through its image clarity and solid black levels. Strong audio and a clutter-free smart platform sweeten the deal. *HCC #287*


14 Sony KD-55XF8505 → £1,100 ★★★★★

This mid-tier edge-lit Sony set has its strengths, particularly its onboard audio and bright room/bright content playback. But a limited contrast means it never feels overly cinematic. *HCC #287*


15 Hitachi 75HL16T64U → £1,350 ★★★★★

This 75in megascreen offers a lot of 4K image for not a lot of money. Predictably, picture quality can't match that of big-brand rivals – but the TV holds appeal if you're mainly after an SDR display. *HCC #285*

TOP 15 Speakers

01

**Bowers & Wilkins 700 Series 5.1**

→ £3,800 ★★★★

This array finds the larger models in the 700 Series proving their mettle with formidable power and precision, an expressive mid-band and detailed highs. Excellent. *HCC #285*



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02 Wharfedale DX-2 → £450 ★★★★★

The asking price of this 5.1 system will tell you it doesn't offer the last word in surround sound fidelity, but Wharfedale's package is compact, well made and faultlessly delivers on its home-cinema-on-a-budget promise. *HCC #283*


03 KEF Q Series 5.1.2

→ £3,300 ★★★★★

KEF's revamped Q Series now offers Atmos modules for an up-to-the-minute sonic experience. Big, bold-looking speakers. Robust, largescale audio. *HCC #280*


04 KEF R Series 7.1

→ £6,500 ★★★★★

A 7.1 set mixing dipolar and direct surrounds, this package takes its cues from KEF's Blade and offers faultless, largescale home cinema sonics. *HCC #217*


05 ATC HTS7 5.1

→ £3,500 ★★★★★

Brit brand ATC rejigs the driver tech and neutral sound of its SCM range into a wall-mountable, flexible system perfect for discreet AV setups. *HCC #275*


06 Q Acoustics 3050i

→ £1,350 ★★★★★

This update on the previous 3000 series makes subtle performance and styling improvements. The result is an excellent, well-priced, stylish package. *HCC #287*


07 Monitor Audio Silver 500 5.1

→ £3,650 ★★★★★

The new Silver range offers a potent EQ-able sub, sweet design, dipole surrounds and largescale, nuanced sonics. Atmos upfiring models would be nice, though. *HCC #282*


08 Acoustic Energy 100 Series 5.1

→ £1,300 ★★★★★

Acoustic Energy's latest addition scores well on style, ease of install and price, and puts in a consistently entertaining multichannel performance. *HCC #286*


09 Wharfedale Diamond 11

HCP → £800 ★★★★★

Bookshelf speakers and 10in sub combine in a system that offers mid-range and treble finesse and a healthy dollop of boisterous bass. Fun and affordable. *HCC #279*


10 Q Acoustics 7000i 5.1 Slim

→ £1,000 ★★★★★

Consistent tonality and detail retrieval are the standout elements here, joined by a cute, easy-to-accommodate design – particularly the 7060S sub. *HCC #284*


11 Focal Sib Evo Dolby Atmos 5.1.2

→ £1,200 ★★★★★

Enjoyable-sounding and well-priced sub/sat system with Atmos upfiring in front L/R enclosures. Not the smallest 'satellite' speakers around. *HCC #276*


12 Polk Signature Series 5.1

→ £1,450 ★★★★★

Largescale performance from a well-priced floorstanding system with slimmed-down centre enclosure. Upfront and boisterous sound; a great entertainer. *HCC #273*


13 DALI Opticon 5.1

→ £3,200 ★★★★★

The Opticons employ driver designs from DALI's high-end models, and showcase a talent for involving music presentation and thrilling home cinema. *HCC #260*


14 Piegia TMicro 5.1

→ £4,000 ★★★★★

An expensive but classy package for those seeking high style in their home cinema, with a focus on clear, smooth and cohesive sonics. *HCC #283*

TOP 10 Projectors

01 Sony VPL-VW760ES → £15,000 ★★★★★

This premium beamer adds laser illumination to Sony's 4K SXRD projection technology, and the results are staggering. It's not super-bright, but images are detailed, vivid and supremely well-balanced. Worthy of flagship status. *HCC #283*

02 JVC DLA-X5900 → £4,000 ★★★★★

An outstanding performer at this price point. JVC's latest D-ILA model may lack native 4K silicon but its eShift 4K engine shows real improvement and HDR playback has been greatly boosted too. A compelling home cinema PJ. *HCC #282*



03 Optoma UHD51

→ £1,500 ★★★★★

This affordable 4K DLP model adds 3D playback (at 1080p) to its home cinema repertoire, making it an obvious upgrade for stereoscopy fans. Sharp, colour-rich and dynamic visuals. *HCC #287*



04 Sony VPL-VW360ES

→ £7,000 ★★★★★

In Sony's 4K range between the laser-based VW760ES and entry-level 260ES you'll find this accomplished beamer. Excellent imagery with both SDR and HDR. Motorised controls. *HCC #284*

05 Vivitek HK2288

→ £2,500 ★★★★★

The Taiwanese brand returns to the UK with a 4K DLP PJ that balances impressive HDR brightness with stable images. Excellent remote control and decent zoom and throw options. *HCC #285*

NEW ENTRY

06 BenQ TK800

→ £1,200 ★★★★★

A lot of enjoyable performance crammed into a compact package. Offers 4K HDR playback, plus 3D, with only a limited black level and occasionally pushed colours counting against. *HCC #288*



07 Optoma UHZ65

→ £5,000 ★★★★★

The asking price here reflects Optoma's addition of laser illumination (yielding improved contrast and far greater 'lamp' life) to the DLP 4K and HDR playback talents of its stablemates. *HCC #282*



08 Acer VL7860

→ £3,500 ★★★★★

Laser 4K DLP projector that misses out on the contrast performance of some models, but undercuts them in terms of pricing. Use the Silent mode for whisper-quiet operation. *HCC #284*

09 Epson EH-TW7300

→ £2,200 ★★★★★

Similar performance traits to its bigger EH-TW9300 sibling, but with reductions in max brightness (and claimed contrast). 4K upscaler, rather than native, with HDR playback. *HCC #269*

10 BenQ W1050

→ £500 ★★★★★

There are a few cut corners on this budget DLP 1080p model (no backlight on the remote, no lens shift, a meagre zoom), but overall movie performance is good for the money. *HCC #283*

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TOP 10 Blu-rays

01



02

**Oppo UDP-203** → £650

Oppo debuted 4K with a superb universal design including Dolby Vision HDR. Packed with user adjustments and connectivity. No apps or Darbee processing, and the brand has now withdrawn from the BD market. *HCC #269*

03

**Sony UBP-X800**

→ £270

Sony embraces UHD Blu-ray with a full-width, sturdy design that'll also spin DVD-A and SACD platters. A great all-rounder, but no current Dolby Vision support or word on an update. *HCC #274*

04

**Panasonic DMP-UB900**

→ £370

The Ultra HD Blu-ray format got an inspiring debut in Panasonic's multi-talented deck that offers a sterling picture performance, 4K-enabled VOD apps and analogue audio outs. No DV. *HCC #259*

05

**Sony UBP-X700**

→ £250

A compact player promised a DV update this Summer, the UBP-X700 has a nondescript design, no analogue outs and a stubby remote. But it plays great, and offers SACD support. *HCC #284*

06

**Cambridge Audio CXUHD**

→ £800

The lack of analogue outputs is a surprise considering CA's heritage, but this universal (and DV-capable) deck sounds sweet over its digital outs. As with Oppo's UDP-203, a MediaTek SoC is used. *HCC #279*

07

**Panasonic DMP-UB700**

→ £300

Shorn of some of the audiophile niceties of the UB900 (including multichannel analogue outputs), but still a safe pair of hands with your 4K BDs. And at a bargain price. *HCC #270*

08

**Panasonic DMP-UB300**

→ £130

Great 4K imagery from this bargain deck, but you might prefer to up your budget for the UB700 – no split HDMI, optical/coaxial or Wi-Fi connections here. Half-size design for an easy install. *HCC #272*

**Samsung UBD-K8500**

→ £180

Debut Ultra HD Blu-ray player that finds fans courtesy of its sensible price point (now even lower), connected smarts and eye-catching visuals. Build quality is a little uninspiring. *HCC #260*

09

**Samsung UBD-M9500**

→ £230

Second-gen 4K player that adds features (mobile BD streaming, 360-degree image support) but removes 3D playback capability. As before, the chassis is curved. UHD discs look pin-sharp. *HCC #275*

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Photo courtesy of UK Home Cinemas

TOP 10 AV Receivers/AV Processors

01 Denon AVR-X6400H → £2,100 ★★★★★
This receiver's 11 channels of power are joined by Atmos, DTS:X and integrated Auro-3D, plus HEOS multiroom integration, making it peerlessly flexible. Sound delivery is quick-footed and articulate. A superb one-box solution. *HCC #280*

02 Arcam AVR850 → £4,500 ★★★★★
High-end seven-channel AVR marrying Class G amplification and Atmos (and future DTS:X) support with talented Dirac Live Room EQ. 11-channel pre-outs for full-fat setups. *HCC #257*

03 Denon AVC-X8500H → £3,300 ★★★★★
For those want to go even bigger with their Atmos/DTS:X system, this flagship provides 13 channels of power. Setup can be complex, and there's no FM tuner, but otherwise this is first-class. *HCC #285*

04 Trinnov Altitude16 → £13,000 ★★★★★
High-end 16-channel processor dazzles with its Optimizer room/speaker calibration tech. Balanced outputs for compatible amplifiers. Reference-grade sound quality. *HCC #287*

05 Marantz NR1608 → £600 ★★★★★
With a smoother sound signature than before and the addition of HEOS multiroom, Marantz's 7.1-channel slim-line AVR flies the flag for living-room friendly AV. Only one HDMI out, though. *HCC #278*

06 Marantz AV8805 → £3,600 ★★★★★
The most affordable 13-channel processor around, the AV8805 combines lean looks, setup flexibility and a musical, detailed sound performance. Uses Audyssey MultEQ XT32 calibration. *HCC #288*

07 Sony STR-DN1080 → £550 ★★★★★
Sony is back in the AVR game with a first Atmos model that adds worthy phantom rear speaker processing to its 5.1.2 sonics. A few UI niggles don't take much of the shine off an impressive budget buy. *HCC #277*

08 NAD T 777 V3 → £2,500 ★★★★★
Dirac-enabled seven-channel AV receiver (with 11-channel processing). Powerful, even-handed sonics and wonderfully easy to use, but a firmware update is still awaited for DTS:X decoding. *HCC #285*

09 Yamaha RX-A3070 → £1,600 ★★★★★
Currently Yamaha's most potent receiver, this nine-channel model is packed with features and performs solidly, but a GUI/remote control upgrade would be welcome. *HCC #286*

10 Denon HEOS AVR → £800 ★★★★★
Able to run wireless rears/sub (using HEOS models) and sporting a display-free design, this is a five-channel AVR with a different approach. One for HEOS devotees only. *HCC #276*

TOP 5 Bonus features

Xploring Xtro
Possibly the best thing about Second Sight's Blu-ray for the bonkers, low-budget, cult UK sci-fi *Xtro* is this hilarious and candid hour-long *Making of...* doc. Essential post-movie viewing. *HCC #288*
★★★★★

Kingsman: Inside the Golden Circle
A near two-hour doc, split into nine parts, is perhaps more than this hit-n-miss sequel deserves, but there's plenty of info and insight here into K2's production. *HCC #283*
★★★★★

Thor Ragnarok: Director's Commentary
Taika Waititi delivers an oddball, frequently hilarious chat track that fits this movie's anarchic nature well. A fine solo effort, albeit with an unexpected guest star... *HCC #284*
★★★★★

The Director and the Jedi
This 95-minute *Making of...* documentary is the must-see extra on *The Last Jedi*'s BD. More than just a typical overview of the film's production, this is skilfully edited and utterly absorbing. *HCC #285*
★★★★★

You Must Remember This: The Warner Bros. Story
The 480i image isn't great, but this 289-minute film charting WB's rise to the top of Hollywood is a brilliant addition to the *Casablanca: Premium Collection* BD. *HCC #284*
★★★★★

TOP 10 Subwoofers**01****02****SVS SB-2000** → £800

This follow up to the SB-1000 offers immense value for money. A mid-sized woofer that imbues Blu-rays with quick, taut and potent LFE, it's a perfect introduction to what a truly good sub can accomplish. *HCC #233*

03**Bowers & Wilkins DB1D**

→ £3,750

This sequel to the DB1 moves EQ to an app and changes driver/amp design. Beautifully controlled performance with depth and detail. Gorgeous bodywork. *HCC #277*

04**JL Audio Fathom f212v2**

→ £6,500

A second outing for JL's 2 x 12in monster, with an increase in power (3,600W) and room EQ improvements among the changes. Sounds as good as you'd imagine. *HCC #261*

05**SVS SB16-Ultra**

→ £2,500

A 16in driver and 1,500W amp combine to give SVS's flagship sealed sub real appeal. Goes low but remains tight and fast. App-assisted EQ and operation. *HCC #270*

06**REL HT/1003**

→ £500

REL targets film fans with a 10in sub that drops its usual simultaneous high/low-level input to hit a new price point. Power and speed are its strengths. *HCC #286*

07**REL T7i**

→ £850

Easy to house 8in sub (with 10in passive driver). Decent LF extension joined by superb speed. Wireless transmission via optional (£200) system. *HCC #277*

08**SVS SB-4000**

→ £1,800

Similar in operation and styling to the SB16-Ultra flagship, but smaller and more affordable. Superior DSP results in a real sense of control. *HCC #284*

09**GoldenEar SuperSub X**

→ £1,450

Four drivers squeezed into a relatively compact design and given plenty of push from a 1,400W amp. Standout traits are impact and depth. *HCC #272*

10**KEF Kube10b**

→ £600

The middle option of KEF's new Kube range packs a 10in driver, 300W Class D amp and 56-bit DSP engine to maintain efficient low-frequency control. *HCC #283*

TOP 5 Console games**God of War**

An HDR showcase for both PS4 and PS4 Pro (and playable in upscaled 4K on the latter), this action/puzzler is massive in scope and, in the Leviathan Axe, features perhaps the best weapon in gaming! *HCC #286*

**Call of Duty: WWII**

Eschewing the more fantastical elements of recent *COD* entries and giving greater emphasis to tactics and staying alive, this is a reminder of why the FPS franchise is so well loved. Superb sound FX, too. *HCC #282*

**Monster Hunter: World**

This series breaks out of its Nintendo origins to offer PS4/Xbox One owners varied, open-world gameplay, plus HDR and better-than-HD visuals that can be tailored to your desire. Monstrous fun. *HCC #283*

**Jurassic World: Evolution**

Wanna run your own dinosaur-filled theme park? This addictive and time-stealing movie tie-in lets you do just that. Challenging final levels make up for a lack of variety. Excellent 4K visuals on next-gen consoles. *HCC #288*

**Far Cry 5**

A cautious update on its predecessor, but there's still plenty of fun gameplay to be had in this open-world first-person shooter. Plays in native 4K HDR on Xbox One X, and better-than-HD on PS4 Pro. *HCC #285*

TOP 10 Accessories



01 KEF R50 → £600 ★★★★★

KEF's Dolby Atmos-enabled reflective modules are a smart choice to beef up a system. Using the company's Uni-Q point source drivers pays dividends, enabling full-range sonics that reach deep into your cinema room. First-rate build. *HCC #252*



02 Yamaha WX-AD10 → £150 ★★★★★

Simple to use, unobtrusive add-on that brings MusicCast multiroom/hi-res streaming to legacy AV gear via 3.5mm/phono. Not a bad price – only available in grey, unfortunately. *HCC #274*



03 Amazon Echo Dot

→ £50 ★★★★★

Less impressive as a standalone speaker than its larger sibling, but more affordable. Use its 3.5mm output and Bluetooth to pair with third-party kit. Fun AI experience. A real bargain. *HCC #269*



04 Nvidia Shield Android TV

→ £180 ★★★★★

The Android-based streamer/gaming box gets a gentle revamp – same silicon, neater design, new features including future support for Google Assistant. Slick and easy to use. *HCC #272*



05 Roku Streaming Stick+

→ £70 ★★★★★

If a simple life is your aim, this content-rich, 4K/HDR-capable dongle from the streaming specialist is your friend. Idiot-proof interface and control. Good price. *HCC #282*



06 Amazon Fire TV (2017)

→ £70 ★★★★★

HDR playback has been added to Amazon's great-value media streamer, although the absence of an Ethernet port does niggle considering its 4K talents. Cluttered UI. *HCC #280*



07 Panasonic SC-GA10

→ £230 ★★★★★

Panasonic partners with Google Assistant for its debut smart speaker, and doesn't forget to focus on sonic power as well as AI fun. Pricier than many rivals, but still appealing. *HCC #284*



08 Apple TV 4K

→ £180 (32GB) ★★★★★

With Apple's iTunes movie store offering 4K HDR (Dolby Vision) movies at the same price as Full HD downloads, this compact media player (irritating handset aside) is sure to tempt. *HCC #284*



09 PSB Imagine XA

→ £350 ★★★★★

These two-way Dolby Atmos-enabled upfiring speakers are fairly chunky, but work well at creating a height layer and the £350-per-pair ticket makes them an enticing option. *HCC #264*



10 LG WK7

→ £200 ★★★★★

This cylindrical Google Assistant speaker bundles fun voice interaction with a generally pleasing – if not standout – sonic delivery produced in combination with Meridian Audio. *HCC #287*

TOP 5 Blu-ray/DVD boxsets



1 Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex – Complete Series Collection: Deluxe Ed.

A 100-page book, and other extras, are bundled with this pricey boxset that collects the brilliant anime's two seasons and three 'OVA' films. *HCC #286*



2 Woodfall: A Revolution in British Cinema

Bolstered by a host of archival featurettes and documentaries, this BD set gathers eight movies from the game-changing British studio, including 1963 Oscar-winner *Tom Jones*. *HCC #288*



3 Buck Rogers in the 25th Century: The Complete Series

A lack of decent extras takes the shine off this package somewhat, but Buck looks pretty good in HD and the show remains as weird and wonderful as ever. *HCC #285*



4 Five Tall Tales: Budd Boetticher & Randolph Scott at Columbia, '57-'60

A quintet of Western B-movies receives a deluxe presentation thanks to Indicator's BD package. Comes with a fabulous 80-page book. *HCC #287*



5 Samuel Fuller at Columbia, 1937-1961

A second Columbia Pictures set from Indicator, packing seven flicks from the crime reporter-turned filmmaker. Impressive picture quality and decent extras. *HCC #288*

TOP 10 Soundbars & Soundbases**01****Yamaha YSP-5600SW** → £1,900

With its 46 drivers (including upfiring) this premium 'bar delivers precisely-steered and immersive audio, even of the Atmos variety. Potent wireless sub and 4K-capable HDMI switching sweeten the high-end deal. *HCC #254*

02**Canton DM55** → £330

Canton's smallest soundbase still delivers big sonic thrills. Twin woofers underpin clean and crisp mids and highs, and build quality is first-rate. Doddle to use. Bluetooth built-in. *HCC #260*

03**Samsung HW-K950**

→ £1,300

Soundbar with additional wireless rears and Dolby Atmos support via four upfiring drivers. Impressively largescale performance, good connectivity. No native DTS support. *HCC #263*

04**Samsung HW-MS750 / SWA-W700**

→ £700/£600

Upfiring drivers on this premium 'bar, but no Atmos decoding. Performance still dazzles, and the optional sub shows its merits with movie soundmixes. *HCC #278*

05**Denon HEOS Bar**

→ £570

Multiroom-ready and app-controllable, this premium single-enclosure model offers powerful, detailed and warm sonics in spades. Can be expanded into a 5.1 system with extra HEOS hardware. *HCC #287*

06**Q Acoustics M3**

→ £300

A 4in x 6in woofer is tucked away in the M3's eye-catching angular chassis, ensuring this well-priced soundbar has a full-range performance. Simple to use. Bluetooth streaming. *HCC #271*

07**DALI Kubik One**

→ £800

The Danish speaker brand brings a slice of glamour to your setup with this stylish soundbar. No HDMI or digital decoding but it packs a tight, lively and nuanced sound. *HCC #269*

08**LG SK10Y**

→ £1,200

High-price but high-performance, LG's Atmos-enabled soundbar system is large in scale, rich in bass and offers 4K HDMI switching. Over 1.4m wide, so won't suit all setups. *HCC #288*

09**JBL Bar Studio**

→ £150

No subwoofer here, just a fairly compact stereo 'bar that offers a useful soundstage-widening 'Surround' mode, HDMI ARC connectivity, and a decent performance for the price. *HCC #284*

10**Q Acoustics M2**

→ £300

Easily accommodated in/on AV furniture, and packing HDMI ARC for a simple hookup, this BMR-driver/built-in woofer soundbase impresses with its energetic delivery and price. *HCC #279*

TOP 5 Back-catalogue Blu-rays**The Old Dark House**

This James Whale flick from 1932 mixes offbeat humour with disturbing chills. Brought to Blu-ray by Eureka's Masters of Cinema imprint, it's surely never looked better, courtesy of a fresh 4K scan. *HCC #287*

**Saving Private Ryan: Commemorative 20th Anniversary [UHD Blu-ray]**

Excellent use of HDR, an uptick in detail and a new Dolby Atmos mix make this WW2 drama hard to ignore on 4K BD. No new extras, though. *HCC #288*

**Die Hard: 30th Anniversary [UHD Blu-ray]**

The fact this celebratory 4K disc offers no new extras is annoying, but otherwise it breathes fresh life into John McTiernan's action/thriller masterpiece. Yippee ki-yay! *HCC #287*

**The Matrix [UHD Blu-ray]**

The iconic sci-fi/actioner is richly treated by Warner's new 4K outing. Dolby Atmos audio has fun with the wraparound sound design; Dolby Vision HDR and nuanced colour grading ensure it looks gorgeous. *HCC #288*

**Iron Monkey**

Yuen Woo-ping's glorious 1993 fight-fest has lost none of its kinetic energy, and Eureka's BD brings it home with aplomb. Features a new 2K restoration and Mandarin, Cantonese and English soundmixes. *HCC #288*

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TOP 5 PVRs**Virgin Media TiVo, £subscription**

This triple-tuner PVR offers recording flexibility, useful features – you can undelete deleted shows! – and smart TiVo functionality. If you're in a cable area, consider it

★★★★★**Sky Q, £subscription**

Sky's new top-tier product offering dazzling with its image-rich user interface, wireless multiroom skills and recording flexibility delivered by the PVR's 12 tuners. Now supports 4K content

★★★★★**Humax FVP-5000T**

Revamped menus, faster operation and tweaks to its triple-tuner engine make this the most advanced Freeview Play PVR around – and it doubles admirably as a DLNA player/media jukebox. 500GB/1TB/2TB

★★★★★**Humax DTR-T4000, £subscription**

This YouView-based PVR is required to get BT Sport's new Ultra HD channel – available to those with BT fast fibre and a BT TV sub. Easy to use and with 1TB of storage

★★★★★**EE TV Smart Box, £subscription**

This quad-tuner 1TB PVR, from the mobile/broadband corp, offers innovative Replay 24-hour channel recording and great Smart device streaming. Needs more catch-up though

★★★★★**TOP 5** Headphones**Sony MDR-HW700DS, £800**

Comfy cans supplied with an HDMI surround processor, enabling multichannel audio to be fed to a virtual 9.1-channel soundstage. The effect is superb – great for late-night listening

★★★★★**Nuraphones, £350**

Unusual over-ear/in-ear hybrid cans that measure the acoustic response of your inner ear to fine-tune performance. It's a highly impressive trick, but the design can make these a bit uncomfortable to wear.

★★★★★**1More MK802, £150**

Ignore the bling-tastic blue or red finishes and focus on the assured sound performance from these well-priced closed-back cans. Features include wireless Bluetooth and app control (with burn-in mode). Great value

★★★★★**Bowers & Wilkins PX, £330**

B&W adds noise-cancelling to the general spec of its previous P7 wireless cans, a welcome update for those seeking uninterrupted listening. Offers a neutral, balanced sound suited to both movies and music

★★★★★**Audio Technica ATH-SR9, £400**

45mm drivers and Audio Technica's Midpoint Mount tech deliver wide, deep, spacious sonics. Memory foam padding aids listener comfort; 3m cable should suit most AV setups

★★★★★**TOP 5** Wireless speakers**KEF Muo, £300**

Portable Bluetooth speaker that's a cut above much of the competition. KEF's sonic knowhow results in a punchy, dynamic presentation that cherishes lossless rips. Excellent build quality

★★★★★**Sony SRS-X11, £60**

An affordable palm-sized Bluetooth speaker with internal rechargeable battery, Sony's SRS-X11 is supremely portable and sounds decent for the money. A neat little gizmo. Get two and they can work in stereo

★★★★★**Dynaudio Music 7, £875**

Top-of-the-range multiroom option from Dynaudio, this sizable speaker creates a full-range, detailed soundstage. Music App offers useful adjustments and EQ modes. Inputs include HDMI (ARC)

★★★★★**AirPulse Audio A200, £800**

Monitor-style active speakers offering physical and wireless hookups, a premium build and a sweet yet weighty sound delivered by ribbon tweeters and 5.5in midbass drivers

★★★★★**Denon HEOS 5 HS2, £350**

The mid-range multiroom speaker gets a second-gen revamp, adding welcome hi-res audio playback and Bluetooth connectivity. Gorgeous looks, boisterous, room-filling sound

★★★★★

HOME CINEMA Choice

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AV Avenger

Music, not movies, pioneered the immersive AV experience, argues a rock-n-roll **Steve May**. But even the biggest gigs can have a bad day...

OZZY OSBOURNE WAS looking a little off-colour.

His complexion was pallid and he had a weird green glow. Now for all I know, he may actually look like that in real life. But from my vantage point, three quarters of the way up the hill from the main stage at the Download festival, something seemed amiss.

The giant screens that towered above the stage had apparently lost their vertical hold. Images of Ozzy's band were torn and wobbly, as if the sync had gone to hell. Every so often these screens would go dark completely. Was Ozzy still on stage? From where I was standing, there was no way of telling. The faithful showed remarkable patience as technical hitches continued.

Big festivals like Download and Glastonbury now rely on the power of monster video displays to work. Without them, the former Black Sabbath singer was lost like a bat in the night.

As it happened, the day after Ozzy's bigscreen fail, I was heading to the O2. Not, unfortunately, to attend the Metal Hammer Golden Gods Awards taking place at the Indigo that night (my tatty Download festival wristband wasn't enough of a credential to sneak me in), but to see Shakira strut her stuff on the London date of her Eldorado world tour.

Her latino-infused pop isn't really my cup of tea, but after Ozzy's screen meltdown, I was thrilled that Shakira's show boasted startlingly good AV. Behind the stage, a trio of gigantic vertical screens relayed the singer's gyrations with breathtaking clarity. I've no idea about their resolution or colour space, but the experience was hypnotic. If Shakira had a setting, it would almost certainly be Vivid.

While bigscreens are now part and parcel of the concert experience, it wasn't always the case. Pink Floyd may have pioneered gig AV on their Dark Side of the Moon tour in the 1970s, but I didn't

experience anything like what is now commonplace until I saw KISS some two decades later.

Fittingly it was in Indianapolis, home of custom install organisation CEDIA. I was in town for the annual CEDIA expo, and the rockers just happened to be playing the local stadium. I'd seen KISS before, but only in the UK where they had toured without all their stage show paraphernalia. Here, in their native habitat, monster screens made these larger-than-life characters even larger. When Gene Simmons dribbled blood during his *God of Thunder* bass solo, it threatened to flood the auditorium.

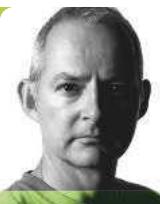
A visceral marriage of huge images and bone-rattling sound; I'd not witnessed anything like this before. KISS alive seemed like the perfect manifestation of the kind of AV dreams on display at that year's CEDIA show – and it's worth remembering that **the premium cinemas we now take for granted didn't really exist back then**. IMAX offered short documentaries about dinosaurs or sea-life. Even the best theatres were only just beginning to take presentation seriously.

Today, big AV is everywhere. You can't get away from it, even on your Summer holiday. Cruising between Penang and Phuket, I watched World Cup matches on a huge screen aboard my yacht (okay, it wasn't 'my' yacht, but you get what I mean). And although designed to offer brightness in blistering daylight, this digital display really scored at night.

So monster AV has become ubiquitous, and is not the sole preserve of the movie house. And as I learnt from KISS several decades ago, scale and drama always trump technical specifications. Shakira gets it. Ozzy, much as I love him, still seems in the dark ■

Have you had any awesome AV concert experiences? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Steve May once tried to apply KISS-style face paint, but just ended up looking like an evil version of Ronald McDonald





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